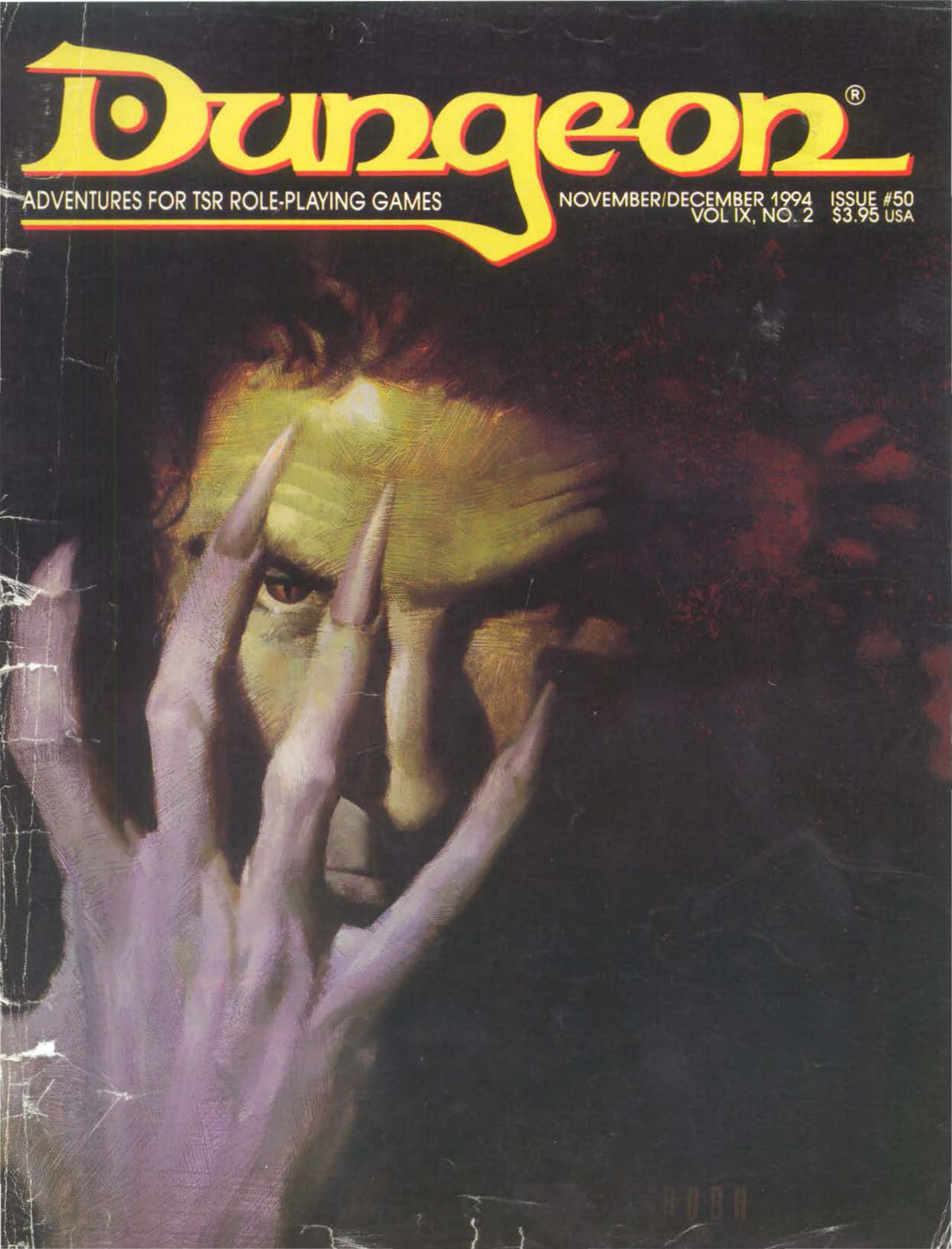
Dungeon®

ADVENTURES FOR TSR ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1994 ISSUE #50
VOL IX, NO. 2 $3.95 USA



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COVER: Only "Felkovic's Cat" can defeat Baron Urik von Kharkov. Meet the despotic ruler of Valachan in this issue's cover painting by Robh.

Issue #50 Milestones

The first issue of DUNGEON® Adventures I worked on was #4. It was January 1987, and Roger Moore was going crazy trying to edit two periodicals at the same time.

By issue #9, I'd moved up from associate editor to editor, giving Roger enough time to concentrate on DRAGON® Magazine's monthly schedule.

Readership increased steadily, and so did the submissions you sent in for publication. Just keeping up with reading the manuscripts could be a full-time job, leaving no time to actually produce a magazine. Near the end of 1991, we hired Wolfgang Baur as the newest member of the DUNGEON Adventures team. Wolf had been writing intriguing modules for us, alone and with fellow Cornell University student Steve Kurtz. When Steve mentioned that Wolf was leaving school and looking for a job in the midwest, we knew just whom we wanted for the new position of assistant editor.

Those of you with complete (or almost complete) collections of DUNGEON Adventures know how we've grown and changed over the years . . . and how we've stayed the same. Visually, the magazine looks very much like it did in those first few issues. Larry Smith, our art director, is itching to give the magazine a new look—nothing radically different, just enough to make new (and old) readers sit up and take notice. The contents will remain much the same: solid AD&D® and D&D® game adventures that are as much fun to play as they are to read. We'll continue to offer adventures based in TSR's unique game worlds as well as generic adventures that can be run in any campaign.

Over the years, it's been your participation that's helped shape the direction of DUNGEON Adventures. As I've often said here, and in response to your letters, we can't publish adventures we don't receive. If you want to see more of a specific type of adventure, write for our guidelines (see address on page 6) and send us a proposal. If you're not ready to jump in with a module idea, at least write us a letter and let us know what you'd like to see in our pages. Above all, tell us what you find useful, so we can continue to give you an attractive package of high-quality adventures every other month.

I'm looking forward to issue #100. Who knows what milestones we will all have passed by the time March 2004 rolls around?

Barbara G. Young

Vol. IX, No. 2

PUBLISHER: TSR, Inc.
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Brian Thomsen
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Kim Mohan
EDITOR: Barbara G. Young
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Wolfgang H. Baur

Printed in U.S.A.

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Dale A. Donovan
ART DIRECTOR: Larry W. Smith
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TYPESETTING: Tracey Isler
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ADVERTISING: Cindy Rick

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Tiger, tiger burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
William Blake, *The Tiger*

LETTERS

Please let us know what you think about this issue of DUNGEON® Adventures. Although we can't print every letter we receive, we read them all and seriously consider your comments and suggestions. Write to: Letters, DUNGEON Adventures, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. You can also contact us by sending electronic mail to tsr.mags@genie.geis.com. We will not publish your address (regular or email) unless you specifically request us to do so.

Total Party Levels

Why is it, on the table of contents page, you list the suggested level per PC, but not the suggested total party level? When I'm looking for an adventure to run I pull out my stack of DUNGEON® magazines and begin looking for something of appropriate total level. As it is now, I have to take a pen and write in the levels so I can quickly scan the table of contents for appropriate-level adventures.

Someone else suggested you print spell descriptions in your adventures. I think this would take up too much room, but printing the page numbers for spells and especially magic items would be very helpful.

Steve Blum
belalagosi@aol.com

In this issue's table of contents, we've listed the total party levels for each adventure, along with the suggested range of PC levels. Page numbers and book references for every spell and magical item would take up too much room. We try to alert readers to spells and items taken from various sources, but if there's no other indication, you'll probably find them in the Player's Handbook *or* DUNGEON MASTER® Guide.

Adapting to Other Systems

Two letters in issue #49 finally prompted me to write, strangely enough because I agree with them. Richard Chase said, "we are all still playing the same game." Well, we aren't, but his point and the rest of his letter is dead on.

After playing and DMing mostly D&D® and AD&D® games for six years, I switched to Fantasy Hero (by Hero Games and ICE). There were no adventures for Fantasy Hero in 1986, so I mostly wrote my own. When I didn't have time to write my own anymore, I checked a lot of source material for a campaign. I liked DUNGEON Adventures by far the best, especially since I also liked the FORGOTTEN REALMS® fantasy setting. The Realms have just the kind of tone I want in fantasy role-playing. I think playing a Realms campaign with another game system gives me a different perspective on this whole plot and story (or lack thereof) discussion.

Like J. Lee Cunningham, I also really admire Willie Walsh's adventures. Among their other virtues, they are easily convertible to my campaign. In fact, some of his generic campaign adventures fit in my version of the Realms better than some of the adventures already set in the Realms. Sometimes the conversion from AD&D statistics to Hero statistics is hard, but I pretty much get the idea of the characters' personalities, abilities, and tactics. How does this apply to your readers? If I were playing the D&D game, I would still use the same adventures, for the same reasons. I would still have to convert them to my campaign.

After all, the authors of these adventures originally wrote them for their own campaigns. Those story elements and statistics must change to conform to each DM's world. It is evident from the diversity of the adventures that there is not really an "official" way to play anymore. Playing only hack and slash? You probably still want to know what the monsters will do in combat. Mostly role-playing in your group? You probably still want a little action. But no matter what your style, you are doing the players no favors if you don't do a little conversion work. So I guess my only real complaint is with all those wanting you to change the adventures to exactly fit their campaigns. It ain't gonna happen.

Now, to see if I can get another discussion going, how about hearing how the readers handle playing time. How long does it take the average party to complete one of these adventures? What techniques do DMs use to speed up play?

Steven A. Mitchell
933 Stableway Rd.
Pike Road, Alabama 36064

Assigning Art

DUNGEON magazine has a fairly selective process for choosing its adventures, but what guidelines does the magazine maintain for selecting art? I imagine that this process must be quite different from submitting adventures. Do you solicit artists for various adventures, and if so, do you send the complete adventure to the artist or just an outline? Also, do you decide which adventure will go on the cover beforehand, or do you request cover art on each adventure going into the issue?

By the way, I thought the fold-out map for "Them Apples" in issue #48 was a wonderful touch. It would be nice to see such gems appear in more issues, but I realize that can get quite expensive. Some of the best aids in DUNGEON

DUNGEON® (ISSN 0890-7102) is published bimonthly by TSR, Inc., 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. The mailing address for all material **except** subscription orders is DUNGEON®, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A.; telephone (414) 248-3625; fax (414) 248-0389.

Distribution: DUNGEON is available from game and hobby shops throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and through a limited number of other overseas outlets. Distribution to the book trade in the United States is by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd. Distributed to the book trade in the United Kingdom is by TSR Ltd. Send orders to: Random House, Inc., Order Entry Department, Westminster MD 21157, U.S.A.; telephone: (800) 733-3000.

Subscriptions: Subscription rates via second-class mail are as follows: $18 in U.S. funds for six issues sent to an address in the U.S., $23 in U.S. funds for delivery to Canada, $35 in U.S. funds for surface mail delivery to any other address, and $52 in U.S. funds for air mail delivery to any other address. Prices are subject to change without notice. Payment in full must accompany all subscription orders. Payment should be by check or money order, made payable to TSR, Inc., or by charges to valid MasterCard or VISA credit cards. Send subscription orders with payments to: TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 5695, Boston MA 02206. The issue of expiration of each subscription is printed on the mailing label for each subscriber's copy of the magazine. Changes of address for the delivery of subscription copies must be received at least six weeks prior to the effective date of the change, in order to assure uninterrupted delivery.

Back issues: Limited back issues of this magazine are available from the TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. For a copy of the current mail-order catalog, write to the above address.

Submissions: All material published in DUNGEON becomes the exclusive property of the publisher, unless special arrangements to the contrary are made prior to publication. DUNGEON welcomes unsolicited submissions of written material and artwork; however, no responsibility for such submissions can be assumed by the publisher in any event. Any submission accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope of sufficient size will be returned if it cannot be published. Please write for our writers' guidelines before sending a module to us; send a self-addressed, stamped envelope (9½" long preferred) to: Module Guidelines, DUNGEON, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

Advertising: For information on placing advertisements in DUNGEON, ask for our rate card. Contact: Advertising Coordinator, TSR, Inc. P.O. Box 756, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

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Second-class postage paid at Lake Geneva, Wis., U.S.A. and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to DUNGEON, c/o TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

magazine have been the library in "Ex Libris" (issue #29) and the city of Waen Fawr in "Goblin Fever" (issue #46).

The last thing I've been wondering about is, what kinds of adventure proposals are you currently seeing too much of? For instance, after Anne Rice came out with her vampire chronicles, it seemed that everyone and their brother was writing something about vampires in the fiction market. Is this the case with DUNGEON Adventures? Are you being overrun with adventures about vampires, or are you battling a landslide of doppelgangers, drow, and giants?

J. Lee Cunningham
Alexandria, Virginia

As soon as we decide to publish an adventure, even before we know what issue it will appear in, we start to think about the illustrations. We look at the number of maps and sidebars required for that adventure and figure out how many illustrations we will need. Then we decide which scenes we would like to see illustrated and write up an art order with the exact size of each illustration and a brief description of the scene. The artist always gets the full text of the adventure. When we take stock of our module inventory to decide what will go into each issue, we figure out which adventure would make the best cover and assign it at that time.

Figuring out which artist is best for an adventure is a very subjective judgment. Sometimes an artist will come to mind when I first read an adventure. I try not to get my heart set on a specific artist, because that person might not have time to do the work by our deadline. Larry Smith, our art director, keeps a file of artists' samples that we look through to find someone whose style matches the tone of the adventure. We love to find and work with new artists whose work hasn't been seen in our pages before.

I hesitate to say that I've seen too many of vampires, or any other particular monster, in DUNGEON submissions. I would hate to discourage someone from sending in an adventure that treated a monster or theme in a new and intriguing way, just because I said I'd seen to much of something. The best thing to do is to read DUNGEON Adventures regularly and try to come up with an idea you haven't seen before, or deal with something commonplace (more goblins??) in an uncommon way.

Doors and Driders

Your adventures are excellent! I commend everyone who writes your adventures for their great ideas. I find DUNGEON Adventures much more convenient than those that cost $9-$10.

I have a couple of questions:

1. In "Prism Keep" (issue #45), how are the PCs supposed to enter areas 26 and 26A? They are totally isolated from the rest of the keep.

2. What happens if you turn a *bag of holding* inside out?

I'd like to bring up some other items. In "Honor Lost, Honor Regained" (issue #48), the antagonist is a female drider. I read in *The Drow of the Underdark* that there is no such thing as a female drider. Drow elves who become driders lose their gender because Lolth doesn't wish to create a new race.

I think it would be a good idea to give the names of alternative references for various items found in the adventures. For example, in "The Oracle at Sumbar" (issue #48), the reference for Rufus the Cruel's caltrops is the *Complete Thief's Handbook*. The *Monstrous Manual* is listed as a reference for the dracolich in the same adventure. Caltrops are also found in *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalog*, and the dracolich is also in the FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting boxed set. Not everyone has the *Complete Thief's Handbook* or the *Monstrous Manual*.

Could you send me some information on back issues? I missed issue #36 and I really want it!

Talon Silverknife
Loveland, Colorado

Please add a door in the wall between areas 24 and 26 of "Prism Keep." Otherwise, it is much too hard for the servants to get from the kitchen to the dining room!

If you turn a bag of holding *inside out, everything stored in it comes flying out at once. (Don't forget to duck!) The inverted bag has no magical properties and can be used as a normal pouch. If you turn the bag right-side out, you can again access the nondimensional space inside.*

According to The Drow of the Underdark, *driders are sexless. I take this to mean that the transformation of their lower bodies includes the elimination of reproductive organs. The same book states that driders retain the memories and personalities of their previous forms. From this, I see no problem in referring to a drider as "she," so long as one doesn't have it laying eggs.*

So many items and creatures are referenced in multiple sources that we'd go crazy trying to list all the references, not to mention running out of room for the adventure. We try to use the most common reference, giving preference to the core books: Player's Handbook, DUNGEON MASTER Guide, *and* Monstrous Manual.

Many issues of DUNGEON Adventures are available from the Mail Order Hobby Shop. For a catalog, write to the Mail Order Hobby Shop, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

A Wish for Restraint

Lisa Smedman's "To Bite the Moon" (issue #48) was a satisfactory adventure in most regards; my little gaming group enjoyed it. The problem was with the use of the *wish* spell to transform the entire PC party into gnolls. Too much! This sort of power is way out of accord with the examples of appropriately used *wish* spells in the official rules. This usage equates to a mass *polymorph* spell, and there is no such thing in the AD&D game. If a wizard can use one *wish* to transform an entire adventuring party into gnolls, why can he not simply use the same *wish* to transform them all into fleas? Think of the implications of such a spell in combat!

I have always been of the opinion that (to utilize a dreadful old cliched phrase) what's good for the goose is good for the gander. In other words, if nonplayer characters can use a spell in one way, so can player characters. In this instance, though I put my high charisma score to use and did some fast talking and thin rationalizing, I had a difficult time explaining to the party's PC mage why he could not cast *wish* spells to turn an enemy army into Greek olives, or an ancient red dragon into an iguana.

Perhaps this is something that could have been written around. In other words, maybe the same transformation could have been effected in other ways. Please, in the future, try to steer clear of modules that take such serious liberties with standard spells.

Tim Scott
Chicago, Illinois

Ω

THE *VAKA*'S CURSE

BY TED JAMES THOMAS ZUVICH

The wages of sin is sometimes worse than death.

Illustrations by Jim Holloway

Ted writes: "Maritime adventures are a bit of a rarity. I hope this one fills a niche. Thanks to Ian, Terrance, Paul, and all the rest of the playtesting crew."

"The *Vaka*'s Curse" is a short AD&D® adventure for two PCs of at least 7th level, or 4-6 PCs of levels 2-4, with a total of at least 14 levels. The adventure is set entirely on board a ship, so it can occur whenever the PCs take a sea voyage. At least one PC should possess a silver or magical weapon.

"The *Vaka*'s Curse" was written for a low-magic campaign but should be easily adaptable to a more conventional style of play.

For the Dungeon Master

L'Trel's shipyards are world renowned for producing high-quality ships. They are also notorious for their rumored connections to the various L'Trellian thieves guilds. Those who don't play along pay a high price for independence, and serious troublemakers disappear—permanently.

In the Corsuhn Shipyards, the connection between shipwrights and pickpockets is well entrenched. Corsuhn is owned and operated by Rhet Corsuhn, a sharp-witted businessman with intimate thieves guild connections. This makes Rhet a dangerous man to cross, but some desperate fool tries it every few years.

About 12 years ago, Corsuhn hired a young man by the name of Vindr as a clerk. On the surface, Vindr seemed to be a calm, trustworthy young fellow. Indeed, Vindr worked quietly and efficiently at his job for two years. In private, Vindr had certain debased personal inclinations, habits so heinous that they may not be mentioned in this adventure. Vindr required a great deal of money to maintain his depraved lifestyle, and eventually he embezzled money from the shipyard accounts. Vindr got away with it for a few months, but Rhet discovered the fraud when Vindr tried to doctor the accounts of the *Vaka*, a ship currently under construction. Rhet quickly contacted his friends in the thieves guild and asked them to "take care of the problem."

The guild happily obliged their longtime partner. Guild enforcers abducted Vindr and took him down to the shipyard. The guild enforcers spiked the fully conscious and thoroughly

gagged embezzler to the prow of the *Vaka*, in place of the ship's figurehead. Rhet even came down and gloated a little as Vindr slowly died. When Vindr took his last gasping breath a few hours later, it was just a matter of a little unconventional magic to transform Vindr's body into wood, so that he really did resemble a figurehead. That was the end of the problem for Rhet and the guild.

Unfortunately, it was not the end of the story. Under his clerkish facade, Vindr was so incredibly evil, and the manner of his death so painful and horrid, that he lingered on. He became an undead spirit akin to a shadow, but more powerful.

From the day the *Vaka* first set sail, Vindr preyed on the *Vaka*'s crew and passengers. Vindr has been very careful not to kill too many people over the years, lest the ship be abandoned as cursed. From his days as an embezzler, Vindr knows that if he skims too much, someone with a sharp eye may take unwelcome notice. The ship's high turnover rate (crews and passengers are always changing on any ship) has helped to hide his evil presence. Even so, the *Vaka* has a reputation among sailors as an unlucky ship.

Beginning the Adventure

At some point in a campaign, the PCs will need to book passage on a ship. The DM can use the *Vaka* to add adventure to a sea voyage of even a few days. When the PCs ask around for a ship, read or paraphrase the information below. If the PCs' journey will be shorter or longer than six days, adjust the fare proportionately. The PCs may wish to check around the docks and sailor's haunts for rumors about the *Vaka*. If they do, see the "Rumors and Information" sidebar.

> You have booked passage on the *Vaka*, a clean, well-run cog. Segel, the ship's captain, struck you as highly competent, although he was somewhat surly and dour, and it seemed like he really had his thumb on the crew. For a six-day journey, Captain Segel charges 55 gp per person, double that for a horse. The *Vaka* has room for four passengers, up to three horses, and several tons of cargo.

On Board the *Vaka*

As the adventurers board the *Vaka*, Captain Segel collects the money for passage, the crew helps them load their gear and animals, and the *Vaka* sets sail on the early morning tide. Captain Segel assigns the forward cabins (areas 12 and 13) to the PCs. PCs with seamanship skills will know that this is unusual; the crew bunks are usually located in the forward cabins. If the PCs ask about the unusual arrangements, Segel explains that his crew seems to prefer the hold cabin, and he does his best to keep them happy. Happy sailors, according to Segel, do a better job.

Once the ship is under full sail and the deck is rolling and yawing, all novice seafarers must make a Constitution check or become violently ill for 1-2 days. During this period, sick PCs suffer a −4 penalty to Strength and a −2 penalty to all combat rolls. PCs with seamanship proficiency automatically succeed in their rolls. PCs who succumbs to seasickness must make another Constitution check every time they set out to sea or suffer the consequences. PCs who do not become sick on their first trip to sea will never get seasick in the future.

Vindr makes his first attack when the *Vaka* is one day out of port. Vindr prefers to target passengers, such as the PCs, since they are transitory and his continued attacks are less likely to be noticed. The evil spirit remains dormant during the day, hiding inside the wooden figurehead (area 17) that was once his body. At night, his wraithlike spirit emerges and prowls the ship. If there are passengers, Vindr slips under a door and attacks his sleeping victim. He could attack during the day, but he prefers to use the cover of darkness.

Vindr makes only one attack per night (one successful drain). Randomly determine which PC will be his first victim. Thereafter, Vindr rotates through the entire group of PCs, hoping to spread the attacks out enough that nobody really notices the drain, or that the victims will attribute the loss to a touch of disease or seasickness.

Vindr, modified shadow: INT average; AL CE; AC 5; MV 12, fly 12 (A); HD 6; hp 36; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 2-5 plus special; SA see below; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, silver weapons do half damage, turned as mummy; MR immune to *sleep, charm,* and *hold* spells; SZ M; ML special; XP 3,000; MM/312 (modified).

Rumors and Information

If the PCs ask questions in the seaport, they can learn more about the *Vaka* and her captain. Each PC will hear 1-3 rumors per day.

The PCs can also hear some of these rumors while aboard the *Vaka*. If the PCs question the crew during the voyage, they hear 1-2 rumors per day.

1. Captain Segel of the *Vaka* has an impeccable business reputation. He always gets to port on time, with his cargo intact.
2. "That ship's cursed," spits a salty old sailor. She refuses to elaborate.
3. Jeris Halfelven seemed like a good sailor when he signed on, but he had to be let go because he kept taking sick. Captain Segel said he was just a lazy hypochondriac. (Jeris Halfelven attracted Vindr's deadly attention.)
4. Captain Segel is a hard man to work for. He pays his sailors top-rank wages, but he demands perfection. (True).
5. Captain Segel drinks a lot. That's why he looks 40 even though he's only 30. (False. While it's true that Captain Segel drinks more than he should, he looks 40 because Vindr has attacked him and magically aged him several times.)
6. Captain Segel talks to himself in his sleep. (True. Segel's subconscious mind is well aware that something stinks aboard his ship. The midnight talking is his subconscious trying to decide what to do.)
7. Segel runs such a tight ship, the *Vaka* doesn't even have any rats. (The *Vaka* does not have any rats because Vindr kills them all).
8. Captain Segel has a sweetheart in Skadhaus Hold, one of the nearby ports. She's a rich widow, a real vamp. (False.)
9. Captain Segel has bad luck hiring new crew. He seems to hire a lot of sailors that work at first, then turn out to be lazy gits once they sign on. (False. Captain Segel has a good eye and hires good crewmen, but Vindr's attacks sap their energy.)
10. Transport on the *Vaka* is a bargain, because Captain Segel likes to carry passengers. (Captain Segel is a pretty sharp fellow. He has noticed that if he carries passengers, his crew stays healthier. He does not like to think about this too much, which is one of the reasons he drinks heavily and talks in his sleep.)

Vindr does not drain Strength like a normal shadow; he drains Dexterity, Constitution, and hit points from a victim. (See the sidebar "Effects of Vindr's Touch.") In some cases, he can even artificially age a victim. When a normal shadow drains Strength, the lost ability points return with a few hours. Ability points lost to Vindr will not come back until he is permanently destroyed, as explained below. These enhanced draining abilities make Vindr much deadlier than a normal shadow. If Vindr is permanently destroyed, any survivors of his attacks regain their Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution at a rate of one point each per week. However, any artificial aging is permanent.

Vindr temporarily dissipates into the ether when he reaches zero or fewer hit points. If no further action is taken, Vindr reforms in the wooden figurehead (area 17) 24 hours later. To permanently destroy Vindr, the adventurers must either cast *bless* and *dispel magic* spells on his mortal remains (the figurehead) or inflict 100 hp damage on the wooden figurehead (AC 5). Before the PCs start hacking at Segel's figurehead, they had better have a watertight explanation for their strange behavior. Nonmagical weapons do no damage to the figurehead. Silver weapons do half damage, and magical weapons or spells do full damage. Damaging the figurehead does not actually hurt Vindr, although he will attack anyone who attempts to destroy his petrified body. Vindr knows that without the figurehead, he cannot reform. Inventive players may come up with other viable methods for destroying Vindr.

Effects of Vindr's Touch
Roll 1d8

1: 2-5 hp damage and drain one point of Strength. Victim feels unusually weak.

2: 2-5 hp damage and drain one point of Dexterity. Victim starts to trip over things.

3: 2-5 hp damage and drain one point of Constitution. Victim develops a slight cough.

4-6: 2-5 hp damage. Victim wakes up in the morning with a pounding headache and blurred vision.

7: 2-5 hp damage; add these hit points to Vindr's total. This increase lasts for eight hours or until sunrise, whichever comes first. The PC wakes up in the morning with a pounding headache and blurred vision.

8: No damage, but the victim ages 1-4 years. A saving throw vs. spells is allowed, and a successful save negates the effect. If the save fails, the effect becomes permanent and remains even if Vindr is permanently destroyed (see area 17). Make an Intelligence check for the other PCs. If one of them succeeds, tell the players, "It appears that the seagoing life does not agree with your companion. There's a few wrinkles and gray hairs you never noticed before."

Normal armor provides no protection against Vindr's icy touch; Vindr attacks the life-force of his victims directly, ignoring the physical body. Magical protections will work (*armor* and *protection from evil* spells, *rings of protection, bracers of defense*), but magical armor improves the victim's armor class by only one point per +1 bonus of the armor. As an example, a person wearing *bracers of defense AC 6* is AC 6 against Vindr's attack, but a person wearing *studded leather +1* is only AC 9.

Vindr's attack is so stealthy and silent that his victims must save vs. spells at −2 to wake up and realize that they are being attacked. If the saving throw fails, the victim wakes up in the morning, weak and shaken, thinking that he has had a bad dream or perhaps a touch of seasickness. If the saving throw fails, do not tell the player the effect of the attack. Simply make a note of it, and take any ability score penalties into account.

If the saving throw succeeds, the PC wakes up from a terrible dream to find a shadowy, ice-cold man-shape sitting on his chest, with its hand sunk into the PC's rib cage. Make an attack roll for Vindr. If Vindr hits, roll 1d8 and consult the table on this page to determine the effect of the attack.

After a few of these bad dreams or bouts of illness, the PCs should suspect that something is attacking them in the night. If they are clever, they will start asking the crew and officers some pointed questions. The rumors and random encounters (see sidebars, pages 9 and 11) also provide information suggesting that something is amiss on board the *Vaka*. Once they have gathered a bit of information, the PCs should set about trying to defend themselves.

One likely course of action is for the PCs to wait in their cabin, faking sleep. When Vindr creeps in by night to attack, the PCs may be able to surprise him. They will certainly be able to see the shadowy-black man-shape as it moves about the room. If the PCs move quickly after they drive Vindr off, they could follow the him back to his refuge in the wooden figurehead. Alternatively, after the PCs figure out that something isn't right on board the *Vaka*, they may scan the ship with *detect evil* or *detect magic* spells, which will eventually highlight the figurehead (area 17). These spells are blocked by the wood between rooms, however, so they cannot be used at night to triangulate Vindr's position below decks.

The *Vaka*

The *Vaka* is a cog, a sailing ship with a single mast, a bowsprit, square sails, a single deck, and stern- and forecastles. The *Vaka* is roughly 100′ long (counting the bowsprit) and carries a crew of 34. It can carry 140 tons of cargo. The ship is currently laden with 120 tons of cargo and can take on 20 tons of PC goods and gear.

Crew (32 male and female humans): AL varies; AC 8; MV 12; F1; hp 7 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; ML 9; leather armor, short sword, light crossbow, dagger.

Crew members have typical proficiencies, including seamanship, rope use, swimming, weather sense, and other nautical skills. The 32 crew members include petty officers and mates. The crew is a competent bunch and largely devoted to Captain Segel. However, the crewmen are a superstitious lot, so Segel does his best to quash rumors and idle speculation.

1. Main Deck. The main deck is clean, well-swabbed, and sanded. It is surrounded by a 2′-high railing, with a removable section for the gangplank. Coils of rope, pieces of tackle, and other nautical equipment are all neatly stowed and very clean. Four heavy crossbows are mounted on the main deck, two to port and two to starboard.

2. Captain Segel's Quarters. The door to Captain Segel's quarters has an excellent lock (−20% to pick-locks roll), and Segel has the only key. The captain's quarters are sparsely decorated. The cabin is outfitted with a desk bolted to the floor, a fold-down table, a fold-down bed, two chairs (both of which can

be bolted to the floor), and a large sea chest. The desk contains a ledger detailing Segel's business dealings, a ship's log, and two books on navigation (300 gp each). The sea chest contains a sextant (100 gp), a spyglass (1,000 gp), a compass (10 gp), several changes of clothes, four bottles of whiskey (12 gp each), and 100 gp in cash. Anyone who reads the ship's log for at least two hours learns that Captain Segel bought the *Vaka* at auction for a phenomenally low price. The ship was sold when the previous owner died of a "heart attack." (How was Vindr to know that the old captain was so weak?)

Captain Segel: AL N; AC 8; MV 12; F6; hp 39; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg by weapon type; S 9 (12), D 14 (16), C 9 (13), I 14, W 13, Ch 16; leather armor, long sword, *dagger +1*. Proficiencies: two-weapon fighting style, seamanship, reading/writing, rope use, navigation. Segel's original statistics are shown in parentheses; his current ability scores reflect the toll of Vindr's attacks. Segel is tall, slim, dark-haired, and dark-skinned.

The captain is grim and dour while he is ashore. But when the wind fills the sails and his ship rides the open sea, Segel becomes an outgoing and dynamic individual. Watching the change is like watching a flower bloom—he almost becomes a different person. Segel is an accomplished captain. He always makes a profit and he can coax phenomenal performance out of the ship and the crew. Under the leadership of any other man, the crew of the *Vaka* would have mutinied long ago.

If anyone asks Segel about the supposed curse on his ship (see the "Rumors and Information" sidebar), he flatly denies that anything out of the ordinary is going on. Once he is through issuing his public denial, he retires to his cabin and has a nice stiff drink of whiskey. Vindr's presence is detrimental to Captain Segel's mental health.

3. Galley. The galley contains food supplies, fuel, cooking gear, and a small ship's oven. The ship's cook usually sleeps in here.

4. Petty Officers' Quarters. Four petty officers share this crowded cabin. (See page 10 for statistics.) Because of the watch schedule, no more than two of the officers are in the cabin at any time. The cabin has two bunks and a tiny table, all built into the walls.

Random Encounters

Roll 1d4 each day. A roll of 1 indicates an encounter from the following list. The DM should either roll percentile dice to determine which encounter occurs, or select an encounter that seems appropriate.

01-03 **Storm:** A storm strikes the *Vaka*. The ship's seaworthiness is 65%, and her fine crew gives the ship a +10% bonus. Ports or anchorages give a +50% bonus, though the captain may not be able to make it to a safe harbor if a storm blows up suddenly.

All PCs must make a Constitution check to avoid seasickness from the extremely rough weather, but those who are not prone to seasickness gain a +5 bonus to the roll.

04-08 **Merrow** (four aquatic ogres): INT average; AL CE; AC 4; MV 6, swim 12; HD 4+4; hp 29, 23, 22, 20; THAC0 15; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1-6/1-6/2-8 or by weapon type; SA attack from surprise, charge; SD camouflage; SZ L (9' tall); ML 11; XP 420; MM/272-273.

Using their green coloration, merrow can hide, becoming effectively invisible 10-80% of the time, depending on terrain. They attack from cover, so others are −5 on their surprise rolls. Merrow charge into battle with spears (2-12 hp damage) at +1 to attack rolls. Thereafter, they melee with talons and teeth. They often attack ships that intrude on their territory.

9-10 **Sea-hag:** INT average; AL CE; AC 7; MV 12, swim 15; HD 3; hp 21; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+6; SA Strength, fright, deadly glance; SD change self; MR 50%; SZ M; ML 11; XP 1,400; MM/181-182.

The hag can *change self* at will, which it often does to appear as either a beauteous human maiden or a mermaid. The true appearance of the hag is so hideous that anyone viewing the hag grows weak from fright unless a successful saving throw vs. spells is rolled. Beings that fail their saving throws lose half their Strength for 1-6 turns. The hag can also mimic human and demihuman voices perfectly. The hag can use a deadly glance three times per day. This look affects one creature of the hag's choosing within 30', though the target is entitled to a saving throw vs. poison. If the save fails, the victim either dies immediately (25%) or falls stricken and paralyzed for three days (75%). The hag uses a dagger in hand-to-hand combat, and her great Strength (18/00) gives her +3 to attack and +6 to damage rolls.

11-30 **Dolphins** (2-20): INT very; AL LG; AC 5; MV swim 30; HD 2+2; hp 18, 11 (×19); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 2-8; SD save as 4th-level fighter; SZ M (5'-6' long); ML 11; MM/59.

The dolphins leap and cavort about the *Vaka* for three or four minutes, then squeak in alarm and rapidly swim away. During the day, the alarm may be due to a shark, sahuagin, or some greater terror of the deep, at the DM's option. At night, Vindr scares the dolphins away.

31-35 **Slack wind.** The slack wind delays the journey by one day.

36-50 **Good wind.** The *Vaka* encounters a good wind, which cuts half a day from the journey.

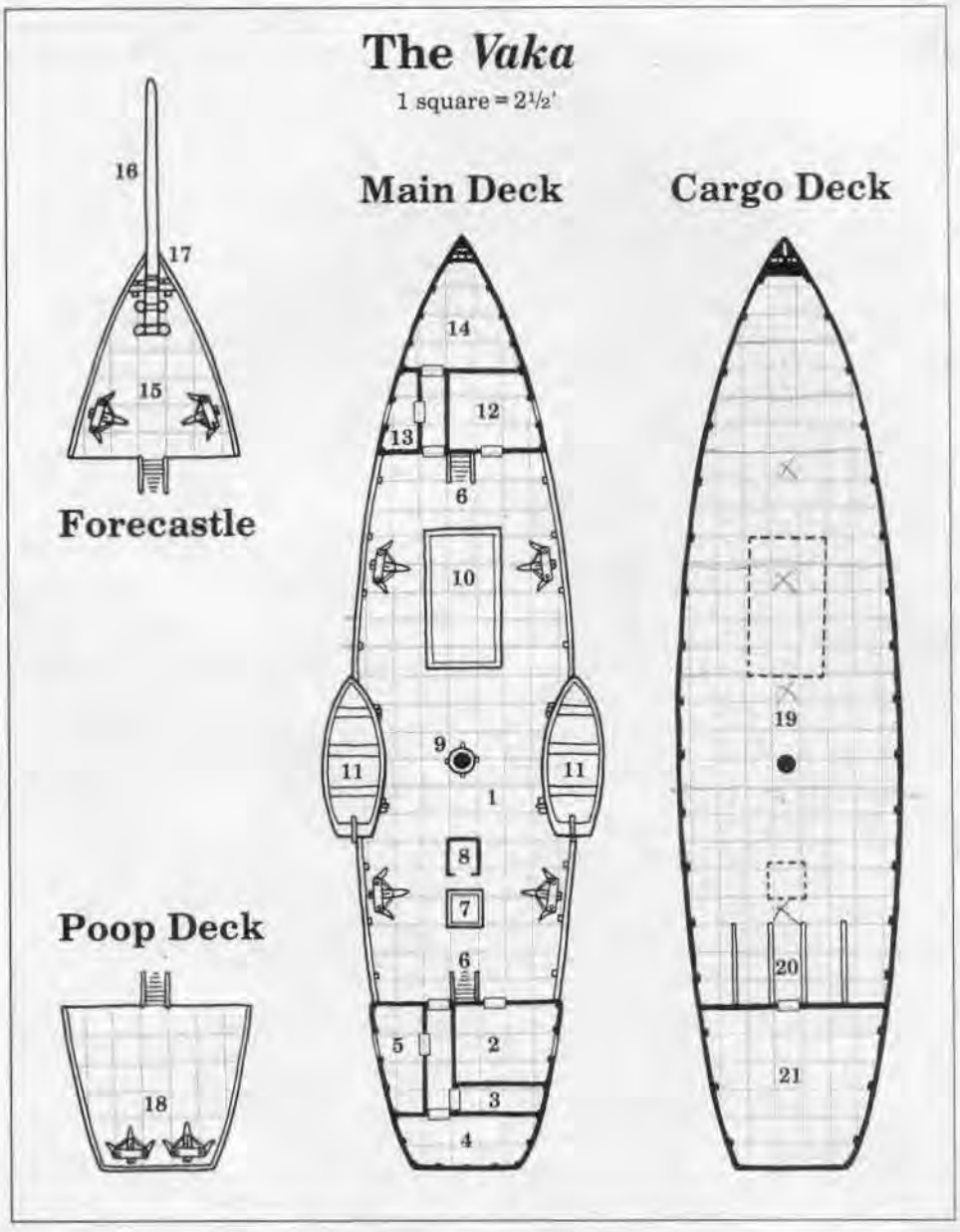
51-60 **Sharks.** A school of sharks follows the *Vaka* for a day.

Sharks (8-18; 2d6+6): INT animal; AL N; AC 6; MV swim 24; HD 3; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 2-5; ML 10; XP 65; MM/117 (Fish).

61-65 **Dead cat.** One of the PCs finds the ship's cat, dead as a doorknob and with all its fur standing on end. If the PC makes this strange event public knowledge, three of the younger crew members hold a funeral service for the poor cat. Use this encounter once, then reroll if it is indicated again.

66-80 **Bad omen.** An albatross flies across the bow, circles the ship three times widdershins, and flies away. The sailors mutter superstitiously that this omen means someone is about to die. Captain Segel comes out of his cabin and shouts, "Get back to work, you rotten bits o' shark bait!" The sailors grumble but return to their posts. Use this encounter only once.

81-00 **Evil omen.** A snow-white sea gull alights on the ship's bowsprit. The sea gull sits quietly for a moment, then emits a startled squawk, raises its wings into a fighting position while looking at thin air, and flies away rapidly. A superstitious old sailor mutters that this ominous event indicates that the ship harbors a great evil. The sailor continuously sneaks hostile, furtive glances at the PCs after this incident. Use this encounter only once.



5. Arnor's Quarters. The door to this cabin is *wizard locked,* as is the cabin's single porthole. The cabin is fitted with a desk, a fold-down table, a fold-down bunk, a single chair, and many shelves and trunks. All of the trunks are *wizard locked.* One of the trunks contains several spell books. In addition to the spells memorized by Arnor, the ship's mage, these books contain the following spells: *read magic, detect magic, wizard lock, magic mouth, light, comprehend languages, bind.* The remaining trunks contain equipment for conducting magical research (worth 2,000 gp total).

Arnor, ship's mage (half-elf): AL CG; AC 9 (8); MV 12; F4/W4; hp 20 (24); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg by spell or weapon type; S 9 (10), D 14 (15); C 14 (15), I 15, W 9, Ch 10; ML 14; *ring of protection +1.* Proficiencies: reading/writing, navigation, seamanship, engineering. Spells: *color spray, mending, shield; alter self, web.* The statistics in parentheses are Arnor's statistics before he was attacked by Vindr. Arnor is light haired, deeply tanned (for a half-elf), and very polite.

Arnor has been Segel's partner and second-in-command for many years. He thinks that something fishy is going on aboard ship, but he cannot pinpoint the source. Five weeks ago, Arnor began a study of illness rates among crew and passengers for various ships; he will complete the study in another week. If the PCs do not find and destroy Vindr during this voyage, Arnor's study leads him to the inescapable conclusion that the *Vaka* really does have an above-average illness rate. Arnor has not learned the *detect evil* spell yet, but he will try to learn and use it once he has concluded his study.

Arnor will not say anything about his study in front of the superstitious crew, but he may privately confide his feelings of unease to the PCs, if they ask.

6. Stairway. These stairways are about 3' wide, with sturdy steps and stout handrails. Each stairway is about 7' long.

7. Hatch. This 3' × 3' hatch covers a ladder that leads down into the cargo hold (area 19).

8. Pilot House. This small fortified structure protects the pilot, who stands inside while steering. Anyone in the pilot house gets a −10 adjustment to AC (90% cover) from missile fire from other ships.

9. Main Mast and Crow's Nest. The main mast of the *Vaka* reaches a height of nearly 75' above the main deck. The crow's nest perches 65' above the main deck. A low rail (3' high) surrounds the crow's nest. Captain Segel will be reluctant to let the PCs climb aloft, because the crow's nest contains one of Arnor's improvements to the ship: a siege crossbow mounted on a rail that runs around the crow's nest, so that the crossbow can shoot in any direction. Segel wants to keep the special crossbow a secret, as an "ace in the hole."

A siege crossbow does damage as a heavy crossbow. It requires a crew of two and fires once per round (range 10/20/30).

10. Main Hatch. The main hatch measures 6' × 10' and provides primary access to the cargo deck. The cargo is brought aboard using a large block and tackle, which is located near the fore of the hatch. The block and tackle is carefully tied down when not in use.

11. Lifeboats. The *Vaka* carries two rowboats for excursions to shore and for emergency evacuation. Each rowboat can hold 12 people (in a pinch). A weatherproof tarp tightly covers each boat. Captain Segel makes a point of checking each boat for stowaways before leaving port.

12. Passenger Cabin. The PCs are assigned to this claustrophobic cabin. The cabin features four built-in bunks and a fold-down table. Captain Segel puts extra cargo in any space not used by the PCs. Normally, the ship's crew would occupy the forward cabins (areas 12, 13, and 14). However, the crew members avoid these cabins much like they avoid the forecastle (area 15), and Segel has decided not to push the issue. He assigns these cabins to cargo and passengers, billeting the crew elsewhere on the ship.

13. Passenger Cabin. If there are more than four PCs, Captain Segel puts any additional PCs in here. Otherwise, the cabin is filled with cargo.

14. Passenger Cargo Compartment. This small area would be devoted to cabin space on most ships. Segel normally fills this cargo compartment with items that require long-term storage. The crew members do not like to come here, so he arranges the cargo to minimize the need for access to this area. On this voyage, any cargo the PCs bring on board will be stored in this area.

15. Forecastle. A 3'-high railing surrounds the forecastle. During tricky maneuvers, Segel stations a crewman here to call out directions to the pilot, who stays in the pilothouse. The bowsprit is accessible from here. The capstan, used to raise and lower the *Vaka*'s anchor, is located on the forecastle deck. Two heavy crossbows are bolted to the deck, one shooting to port and the other to starboard.

If the PCs ask about any unusual behavior among the crew, the DM should secretly make an Intelligence check for each PC. If the check succeeds, the PC learns that the crew members seem strangely reluctant to go near the forecastle, and none of them linger there for long. This avoidance is a function of Vindr's malign undead presence. The crew members are not consciously aware that they avoid the forecastle. The player who asks this question should receive a 100-XP bonus, whether or not the Intelligence check succeeds.

16. Bowsprit. The bowsprit is a 15'-long tapered spar. Anyone who climbs out along the bowsprit must make a Dexterity check each round or fall off into the ocean. Holding one of the rigging ropes attached to the bowsprit gives a +4 bonus to the ability check. A PC can sit on the bowsprit (in which case the Dexterity check automatically succeeds) and hack at the figurehead (area 17) with a weapon.

17. Figurehead. The *Vaka*'s figurehead hangs just below the bowsprit. The heavily gilded wooden figurehead resembles the head and torso of a fully clothed young man. The figure gazes majestically forward, eyes fixed on the far horizon, arms swept back along the sides of the ship.

Although this looks like a normal figurehead, it is in fact all that remains of Vindr's true body, which was transformed to wood and then gilded to hide his murder. The figurehead is lifelike but has no more detail than a normal carved figurehead, because of the magic used to transform Vindr's body into wood. If the PCs cast a *detect magic* spell, the figurehead radiates faint magic. If Vindr is currently resting in the figurehead (as he does during the day), the figurehead also radiates enough evil to register a faint result with a *detect evil* or *detect undead* spell.

Vindr takes at least one memento from each victim that he kills. He stores these trophies in the hollow chest of the wooden figurehead, in the space where his heart would be—if he had one. The mementos include two gp (with holes drilled through the middle), a stack of wire-thin gold bracelets (15 bracelets worth 5 gp each), a silver holy symbol of a sea-deity (15 gp), four gold rings (15 gp each), a gold bracelet (20 gp), a pearl earring (15 gp), two heavy gold necklaces (30 gp each), and a worn leather pouch containing 10 gp. These last coins are a small fraction of the money Vindr embezzled. Rhet Corsuhn was heard to say, "Since Vindr paid so dearly for the opportunity to steal from the hand that fed him, let him keep his payoff—forever."

At the DM's option, one of the four gold rings could be a *ring of protection +1*. If the PCs show Captain Segel the items retrieved from inside the figurehead, he recognizes several pieces as the possessions of former crew members that "died of fever." This is all the proof Segel needs to believe that the figurehead was haunted by an evil presence.

The leather pouch containing the money is a payroll pouch, traditionally used by businesses to hold wages prior to disbursement. A faint, illegible mark is branded into the pouch's bottom corner. The pouch is old and has nearly fallen apart, but casting a *mending* spell restores the mark to legibility. The mark is not immediately recognizable—unless one of the PCs is a native of L'Trel—but a little research reveals that it is the insignia of the Corsuhn Shipyards.

18. Poop Deck. A sturdy railing surrounds the poop deck, providing cover from missile attacks (−2 adjustment to AC) and some protection from the elements. The poop deck has two mounted heavy crossbows, both pointing aft.

19. Cargo Hold. Grain fills most of the cargo hold, although Segel also has a small cargo of wine, some glass, several bolts of fine fabric, two large crates of pepper, and a small barrel of cinnamon sticks. The hold also contains barrels of sea-biscuits, lemons, apples, salt pork, water, ale, rum, hay, oats, and other provisions.

Sixteen of the sailors (see page 10 for statistics) bunk in the cargo hold during their off-duty periods, or join the senior sailors in the hold cabin (area 21) for a few drinks and a card game.

20. Horse Stalls. Each stall consists of a thin wooden partition fixed in place with pegs. If the *Vaka* is not carrying any horses or livestock, the partitions are removed to make space for cargo.

21. Hold Cabin. The cabin has no lock on the door; it is merely a compartment separated from the main cargo hold. The room is outfitted with 10 fold-down bunks, although only eight of them can actually be folded down. The other two are blocked by cargo containers. The cabin is currently occupied by 12 senior sailors, although usually only three or four of them are present at any time. The sailors' duties keep them very busy.

Continued on page 70

BACK TO THE BEACH

BY WILLIE WALSH

☑ beach towel
☑ swimsuit
☐ giant crabs???

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

Willie has a cat, named Mog, who hates chicken, lamb, beef, and fancy cat food, but who likes walking across a typewriter keyboard at inopportune times. "She often writes half a module before I can stop her," Willie says. "Worse, it's usually the other *half that Barbara returns for revision!" See if you can figure out which half of this module was written by the cat.*

"Back to the Beach" is an AD&D® adventure is for 4-6 player characters of levels 1-2 (about 7 total levels). The party should consist of good-aligned PCs with at least one each of the wizard, priest, warrior, and rogue classes.

Set on a wilderness shoreline that can be adapted to suit most campaigns, the module uses one monster from MC14 *Monstrous Compendium® Fiend Folio®* Appendix, but can be played without this supplement if it is unavailable.

Adventure Background

Despite its remote and unfriendly location, the Shrine of Turburt annually attracts hundreds of pilgrims and their followers: tradesmen, hucksters, and stall-holders who descend upon the wilderness shoreline near the time of the winter solstice. There the faithful offer their petitions to the god of the sea, Manannan mac Lir, finding an atmosphere of reverence and peace in the ancient cell that reputedly belonged to a druidic hermit.

Legend has it that Turburt was finally taken to the Land of Promise by Manannan mac Lir himself as a reward for his piety. His followers hope to share in his otherworldly joy by making their pilgrimages.

This year, however, the faithful have been lacking in fortitude, for only a dozen braved the unseasonably rough weather and the dreary wilderness to come to the shrine. But those who did were rewarded with surprise and wonder, for the sea and wind had cleansed the Beach of White Sand, revealing the outlines of stone-built pathways, a number of stone huts, and what looked like a small house.

Word soon reached King Bilious, the local ruler and a devout follower of the sea god. He immediately took the phenomenon as a message from the deity and ordered his sages and experts in antiquities dragged from their beds to investigate. In the meantime, all pil-

grims and treasure hunters were barred from the area on pain of death.

For the Dungeon Master

The storms that uncovered the ruins were random and not divinely inspired. The Shrine of Turburt is only a small part of a once-large monastery. The monks (not druids, as latter-day faithful claim) lived on shellfish, sea-birds, eggs, and rock-fish gathered along the shore, spending their leisure time making works of great beauty for the glory of their minor religion. The fame of their gold- and silversmiths, their talented scribes, and their well-stocked library soon found its way to unlearned ears, and the monastery was plundered several times by bearded pirates who plied the waves in their dark ships. Eventually—its monks slain, enslaved, or scattered in dejection—the monastery was abandoned, though remembered reverently by local herdsmen and (as is often the case) adapted in time to their own humble rites. Though the herdsmen prospered, their herds over-grazed and eroded the soil, so when fishermen supplanted them and wilderness spread over the land, Manannan mac Lir became the local deity and with him grew the sect of Turburt, a mythical druid.

Today, little of the monastery's true past is known by humanity or its kin, and until now only one monkish cell has remained above ground. Local legend and the yearly pilgrims have turned this cell into the "Shrine of Turburt."

When Bilious's sages arrived to assess the site, they found it much as described to them by the pilgrims. However, as they camped uncomfortably in the dunes that night, an alarm was raised. Grabbing whatever makeshift weapons were to hand, the awkward group of scholars started out into the darkness. There they saw monstrous shapes blundering about, waving huge claws in the air and obviously intent on making a meal of the antiquarians and their supplies.

Panicked, the sages flailed about with their shovels and picks before quickly fleeing, and a bedraggled, footsore group of scholars arrived back at court in the morning.

The Crabmen

Ruuchk of the Blue Shell is the Goods Carrier and the Sea Talker. He is the Scavenger of the Beached Beast; the Finder of Buried Metal Shells; and, of course, the Tribe Mover.

When the Out-of-Shell People come to the Beach of White Sand at Sky-Darkening Season, Ruuchk always watches and waits, buried in the dunes. After the Out-of-Shell People have completed their foreign chanting, leaving scraps and sometimes shiny metals when they go, it is Ruuchk who signals the beginning of Year's-End Walk. He waves the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People, knowing, even as his father Auuck knew, that the scroll means the Tribe has Rights when Year's-End Walk begins, after the crowd of foreigners have finished their incomprehensible ceremonies.

It was said that Out-of-Shell People once lived here and did not hunt the Tribe as others do, and that they even made the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People to be waved at the beginning of Year's-End Walk. Ruuchk did not know whether to believe this tale or not, but he waved the scroll as Tribe Mover and was responsible for its safe-keeping.

What he did believe was that down through the years the Tribe was entitled during Year's-End Walk, on the Beach of White Sand, to All Things Outside the Round Stones and Down to the Sea and that the Great Crab would be angry if the Tribe did not drive off all Out-of-Shell People who come from the sea.

But now, when Ruuchk of the Blue Shell, the Tribe Mover, had waved the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People and led the Tribe to scavenge in the dunes of the Beach of White Sand, even as Auuck had done before, and Auuck's mother and grandfather before him, he found that this year the Great Crab had waved his Mighty Claw and cast water onto the land. A good start to Year's-End Walk! The Tribe was soon foraging happily under stones on the storm-ravaged shore.

Then, of a sudden, Muumph of Five Legs sounded the Alarm of Danger Comes. Out-of-Shell People were here!

Ruuchk knew it was still Sky-Darkening Season and Year's-End Walk. The Tribe had Rights as long as they carried the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People! They could Walk and Scavenge and Hoard, and at the end of Year's-End Walk make obeisance to Mother Ocean and the Great Crab dwelling within. And no Out-of-Shell People were allowed to be present!

Finding the strangers had come from the land and not from the sea (for it was the Bargain that all those coming from the sea during Year's-End Walk be Scavenged immediately), Ruuchk of the Blue Shell, Tribe Mover, approached them. But they were angry and struck Ruuchk, who waved his scroll in vain. So he struck them back, and Scavenged their food, and they ran away.

Ruuchk and the Tribe know that more Out-of-Shell People may come to the Beach of White Sand, but they have faith in the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People and the Sanctity of Rights, and, if all else fails, their own great claws to bring the Wrath of the Great Crab on those interrupting Year's-End Walk.

The Treaty

Ruuchk's Scroll of Out-of-Shell People is, as might be guessed, an ancient treaty between the crabmen and local humans. Long ago, Norntal, abbot of the monastery that flourished by the seashore, used his *amulet of comprehension* and several *tongues* spells to bargain with the Tribe. In Norntal's time, the pirates who migrated from port to port as autumn deepened into winter made unwanted stops at the beach of White Sand, plundering the monastery's riches and slaying those monks who opposed them. The monastery was the last point on a line of stops the pirates visited before wintering in southern climes. Their raids occurred with lamentable regularity near the winter solstice.

Norntal knew of the crabmen's winter migration to the beach, for the monks usually took care to remain within their walls at that time, secure from the Tribe's scavengings. The crabmen would conclude their seasonal stay with rites to whatever deities they worshiped, then migrate in the other direction, repeating this cycle annually.

The abbot therefore concluded a treaty whereby the monks would leave the beach entirely to the crabmen, who, in return, would attack anyone who came from the sea. For the 14 nights when the groups of pirates were most likely to arrive, the monastery would be guarded by fierce warriors of the Tribe. The treaty was copied onto two scrolls, one of which was given to the crabmen to seal the deal.

For a number of seasons the agreement worked well. Forkfist, the pirate captain, was very superstitious, and

when he first spied the crabmen (who previously had stayed out of sight) he was sure they were malign spirits conjured up to seal his doom. The pirates stayed away. Then, one autumn, a force of sahuagin landed up the coast, capturing and slaying many crabmen. Disorganized and in hiding, the survivors did not migrate that year. Unfortunately, Forkfist had met an untimely end that summer in a ship's boarding. When his less-superstitious son and heir, Brand, came to the Beach of White Sand, he and his men found it undefended and with no watch on the monastery walls. Being more pragmatic than his late father, Brand landed and attacked the monks. Their defeat was total, and this time no new settlement rose from the ashes.

Later, when the crabmen's numbers had recovered, they came back to the beach. As far as they knew, their treaty with the Out-of-Shell People (as they call humans) was still in force. When pilgrims began visiting, the Tribe politely stayed out of their way. When the pilgrims left (around the time of the winter solstice) the crabmen moved onto the beach as they had always done. This year, much to their surprise, the Out-of-Shell People have broken the Treaty and returned out of season.

For the Player Characters

By now, the antiquarians' ordeal has been exaggerated to an "invasion of monsters from the deep" that has frightened the populace and disturbed the king.

Bilious doesn't wish to order his own men to go to the beach; if they refuse, his authority will be dented. Instead, he decides that troops should remain "to protect the capital" while hired adventurers (the PCs) go back to the beach to investigate.

The adventurers can be passing through the kingdom or may be residents there as circumstances allow. In either case, the PCs learn of the prospect of adventure when a town crier announces the king's need for employees.

> You are staying in a hamlet called Loosard on the road to Halwere, the capital, where King Bilious has his throne. The kingdom is small, but the community is tightly knit and knows much of the doings of His Majesty and his subjects. The latest news has everyone agog. Rumor has it that sea monsters have invaded up the coast and attacked a party of the king's sages, putting them to flight.
>
> This morning, as people are debating whether they should take to the hills, a crier enters Loosard with a proclamation:
>
> "By Order of His Majesty, King Bilious, it is hereby proclaimed that whosoever travels to the Beach of White Sand on His Majesty's Commission and rids the Shrine of Turburt of the foul beasts that have defiled it shall be paid 500 pieces of gold. Who now shall take up the Royal Commission?"

The villagers make no move to volunteer. The crier, Verit, is empowered to increase the fee to 650 gp if a likely party wishes to haggle. He can add nothing to the story the villagers have told, however. No one is sure if the monsters are part of an invasion force or merely a small party of raiders. It is the adventurers' mission to find out and stem the tide of whatever dark forces may be at work.

When negotiations are complete, Verit hands the PCs a scroll that reads:

> By Order of His Majesty, King Bilious:
>
> Know Ye that [PCs' names] are commissioned to investigate the Beach of White Sand on Our behalf and to rid it of its verminous inhabitants. Let all Loyal Subjects grant aid and succor to the bearers of this Commission, by His Majesty's Order. Dated this Day, December 26th, 33.

The "aid and succor" promised by the commission extends only as far as the DM allows. If there are weapons, armor, and mounts to spare from the local militia, they can be freely given. Potions, healing spells, and magical items should not be part of the expected "aid and succor."

Verit, royal crier: AL LN; AC 10; MV 12; HD 0-level human; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; I 14; ML 10; knife, royal safe-conduct.

Across the Wilderness

It is a full day's journey (10 hours) to the Beach of White Sand, which lies on the edge of a circle of wilderness that Bilious (and probably other rulers) claims as part of his kingdom. Only a few paths (maintained by rangers) cross the rough country, and the party may have random encounters.

The DM should roll 1d6 at dawn, noon, dusk, and midnight. A roll of 1-2 indicates an encounter. The DM should choose an appropriate encounter from the list below or roll 1d4 to determine the encounter. No encounter should be repeated. When the party reaches the Beach of White Sand, discontinue checking for random encounters.

1. The party meets a shambling lump of fur named Duuh, an umpleby. Duuh stands looking at them, perhaps wondering if the PCs know where he left his forest home. Duuh defends himself only if attacked. If ignored, the creature stumbles along after the party, cannoning into the PC bringing up the party's rear and generally making a nuisance of himself.

Duuh will aid the party only if someone gives him food and drink. He is totally loyal to his benefactors and may even offer them advice in halting Common. This doesn't necessarily mean his advice is good. Duuh will expect a reward if his advice leads to treasure.

Duuh (umpleby): INT low; AL N; AC 4; MV 9; HD 6; hp 21; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA electric shock (up to 50 hp per shock, but usually in bursts of 1d8+8); SD immune to electrical-type attacks; SZ L (8' tall); ML 14; MC14.

Duuh has three umpleby nets tied around his waist which he can throw as missiles to entrap enemies. If his daily allotment of 50 hp electric shock is used up, he immediately curls up and goes to sleep, no matter where he may be. This would be a good time for the party to leave him behind.

2. The party spies the corpse of a human male lying beside the trail. When the PCs examine the body more closely, they can see that this poor pilgrim has been drained of blood. The culprits, a family of land lampreys, wait to ambush passing fauna (or adventurers). The monsters are 75% likely to remain undetected and surprise the group. They attack creatures in order of size, starting with the largest.

The dead pilgrim's purse contains a small silver holy symbol of Manannan mac Lir (worth 25 gp) plus 13 gp and 10 sp in coins.

Land lampreys (4): INT non; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 1+2; hp 10, 6, 5, 4; THAC0 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1; SA drain 1

hp blood each round for three rounds; encumber at the rate of one point of Dexterity per lamprey attached; SZ S (3' long); ML 7; XP 120 each; MC (fish).

3. A ranger named Diflin approaches the adventurers after observing them for a few hours. He wants to know what they are doing here so late in the year and whether they mean harm to the area.

Diflin will take a meal with the PCs if they treat him civilly. He can identify most creatures described to him with 80% accuracy (but not the crabmen—see below).

If asked about the Beach of White Sand and the Shrine of Turburt, Diflin, like many rangers in the vicinity, knows some of the true history of the monastery. A small, brave band of rangers died while defending the monastery from the pirates long ago, and the tales have been handed down ever since. As the rangers tell it, the monks made a pact with an unknown race of sea creatures to protect them, but the creatures didn't keep faith and the monks were destroyed by pirates.

If the PCs describe the monsters that attacked the king's sages, Diflin suggests they may have been giant crabs, but he finds their aggression puzzling. The few giant crabs he has seen are shy and timid, eating carrion and staying out of mankind's way. Diflin doesn't know about the crabmen because he rarely visits the coast during stormy weather when Ruuchk and the Tribe migrate there.

Diflin: AL LG; AC 7; MV 9; R5; hp 31; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA +4 to hit orcs (species enemy; Diflin suffers a −4 on encounter reactions when meeting orcs due to his great hatred); influence animals (−2 on saving throw vs. rods to avoid being influenced); S 16, D 14, C 14, I 13, W 14, Ch 14; 5'3" tall; ML 14; HS 11% (31%); MS 20% (40%). Statistics in parentheses are Diflin's unarmored values. Diflin has tracking proficiency (roll 15 or under for success), wears studded leather armor, and carries a spear and a long sword.

4. An elf named Symbal approaches the party. He has an idea for a wooden sculpture, but he believes the environment should dictate the subject. As a result, he wishes to find an unusual piece of timber before deciding "what lies within it."

If the adventurers seem particularly fierce, Symbal doesn't even reveal himself, but sits under a scrubby bush, effectively invisible unless a party member can spot invisible objects. If he overhears the PCs' conversation and decides that they are good people, he waits until they have settled down to a rest break, then approaches (−5 penalty on PCs' surprise rolls vs. Symbal's camouflage ability).

Symbal carries three potions of *healing,* which he will offer to wounded adventurers if they welcome him. He is good company and likes jokes, especially ones that put down dwarves.

The elf knows the area well and is acquainted with the ranger Diflin. The elves know very little about the monastery, which was a fleeting human settlement to their eyes, but they do know that crabmen migrate to the Beach of White Sand each winter to breed and carry out rites before returning north. Symbal suggests the creatures may have attacked the king's men because their rites were disturbed. In his opinion, the sages must have been fierce warriors to escape at all, because the crabmen are large, well armed, and numerous.

Symbal (high elf): AL CG; AC 5; MV 12; HD 1+1; hp 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SA +1 to attack roll with bow or sling; SD invisible when immobile in natural vegetation; −5 to opponents' surprise roll when in natural vegetation; S 15, D 14, C 15, I 12, W 13, Ch 12; 5' tall; ML 13. Symbal wears scale mail and carries a shield, three potions of *healing,* and a long sword.

The Beach of White Sand

The shoreline here is dominated by U-shaped sand dunes created by wind blowing inland off the water. The dunes are tallest at the edge farthest from the sea. Salt-tolerant plants and grasses bind the dunes together under normal conditions. However, a large "blowout" has scattered a number of dunes that previously concealed the monastery, revealing the outlines of the walls and buildings. The sages' campsite (area 1) lies among the dunes on the landward side of the monastery.

The crabmen roam the beach, ruins, and dunes both day and night. However, individual tribe members are 50% likely to be asleep when first encountered, either resting in the lee of a stone wall or buried up to their eyestalks in loose sand.

Any active crabmen who sees the PCs will sound a loud clicking alarm that alerts all other crabmen within 100', whether asleep or awake. (A *silence* spell negates an alarm as long as the crabman is within the spell's area of effect.) The goal of all crabmen who hear an alarm or meet humans is usually to escape and hide. They fight in self-defense, if cornered, or if ordered to fight by Ruuchk or Quaacl, the tribe's military leader.

1. The Camp. Lying partially buried by sand are remnants of canvas, rope, and supply boxes. These belonged to the king's men and were abandoned after their misunderstanding with Ruuchk. Numerous biped tracks (from the crabmen) are scattered throughout the area, and the crates have been pried open, emptied of foodstuffs, and crushed. All iron nails, shovels, spikes, and weapons have been removed, though a 100' length of rope, two cloaks, and two water skins remain untouched.

Adventurers who search the area can locate several loose pages from what seems to be a journal. The book itself was ripped and eaten by the crabmen. The PCs can find only a few pages trapped beneath the remnants of a tent. The other pages were either eaten or have blown into the sea.

The last journal entry is written at the top of a page, as if it had been penned just before the antiquarians were obliged to leave. Exposure to the elements has obliterated some of the words. (See page 18.)

2. The Shrine of Turburt. Here the adventurers discover a well-preserved circular hut, which, when seen alongside its recently uncovered brethren, is obviously a cell of the long-departed monks. A newer wall has been constructed on the north side of the cell to form a windbreak. The sand here has been worn away by the passage of many feet. No crabmen prints are visible anywhere within 10' of the structure.

This is what the locals call the Shrine of Turburt. Colored ribbons—each representing a prayer—hang on pegs driven into the outer wall or snagged on projections on the inside of the roofless hut. Some are faded with age. The interior of the circle is bare, unfurnished rock.

. . . by the sea. The beach is divided from the upper shore by a natural embankment, and this from the inland area by sand dunes. It is among the dunes that the wind has uncovered stone structures, or at least their outlines.

There appears to have once been a surrounding wall of dry stone, likely with a gate on the landward side. Inside, the largest structure was a T-shaped temple, set on the one side by a cluster of . . .

. . . attack, which would explain its desertion. The region has abundant sea-birds, fish, and inland game. Its isolation, however, could leave it open to any number of threats. There are signs the inhabitants armed themselves, but one wonders how they managed at all without some force of warriors to . . .

. . . found among the cells. They will be preserved as found in honor of their last struggle. The weather, meanwhile, shows some disimprovement, and the failing light at this season means that a detailed examination is confined to . . .

When we have settled down in this area I think I'll concentrate on the L-shaped scriptorium to see if any fragments of scrolls exist to identify these monks. I look forward to our first day's dig.

Ruuchk and the Tribe recognize this place as human territory, so they do not disturb it. However, they feel at ease exploring and scavenging all other areas of the Beach of White Sand. If the PCs are hard pressed by angry crabmen, this cell will always be a safe sanctuary for them, because the Tribe's laws forbid disturbing it.

3. Monks' Cells. Each of these cells—and the Shrine of Turburt—was the cell of a single monk, where he slept and meditated when not called to prayer in their temple or to work gathering food or creating artworks for the glory of his god. The beehive-shape design of the huts has lasted well over the centuries, and all still have roofs of stone. (Souvenir hunters took the roofing stones from the Shrine of Turburt.)

Anyone exploring these cells (except area 4, see below) finds 1-4 artifacts from the days of the monks: a wooden footstool, a tin plate, a carved driftwood bowl or spoon, prayer beads made of seashells, fragments of roughly woven cloth, cockleshell candle-holders, a broken shield, a crushed skull, or the remains of human bones. None of these items have any monetary value, even for antiquarians.

The bones are all that is left of monks who died fighting in their cells during the final pirate raid. Each cell shows signs of scavenging by the crabmen, who have rooted up fallen furniture and moved aside tumbled stones to grab edible objects, pieces of glass, or shards of metal to hoard as treasure. In area 4, a crabman is still scavenging.

4. Muumph of Five Legs. As the adventurers approach this cell's entrance, a fist-sized pellet of sand and dirt flies out onto the sand. It is joined, a few minutes later, by another. Several pellets already lie on the ground outside, and a sucking noise and a faintly musical humming come from inside.

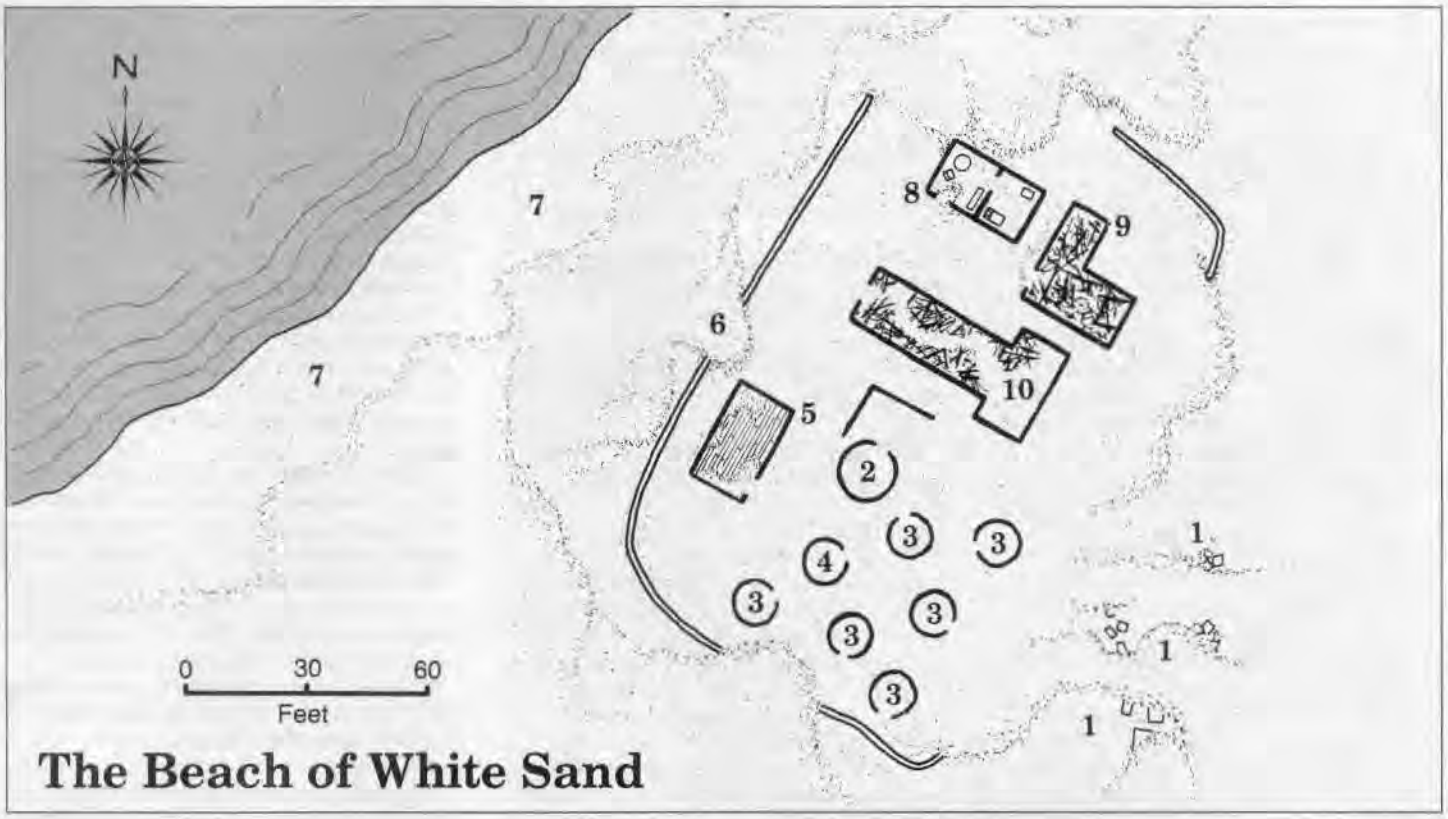
Muumph, a crabman, is sitting happily on the floor of the cell, ingesting likely foodstuffs and spitting out the filtered sand and inedible parts. He defends himself or sounds an alarm as soon as he sees the adventurers. He will run away and hide rather than defend the cell's cache of ancient foodstuffs.

This crabman has five limbs rather than the usual six. His deformity was caused by a genetic defect rather than an injury (which would have regenerated over time), so the tribe calls him "Muumph of Five Legs." The lack of one leg doesn't seem to inhibit him, and he can give good account of himself in a fight if pressed.

Apart from his missing limb, Muumph is a typical crabman of the Tribe. He doesn't really mind humans and their ilk as long as he's left alone. In fact, he seldom even thinks about Out-of-Shell People except near the time of Year's-End Walk when he, like the others, waits at the rocky end of the beach to watch for Ruuchk's ancient signal, a wave of the Tribe's scroll, to mark the beginning of their fortnight's Scavenging.

Muumph thinks humans are probably useful creatures. After all, he has them to thank for his favorite tidbit—beef jerky—which he sometimes finds discarded when the Out-of-Shell People vacate the Beach at Year's End. He knows little about human ways, however, and is unsure whether the Out-of-Shell People are a sentient race like the Tribe.

If allowed, the crabman scuttles off to the refectory (area 5) to hide, giving the Alarm of Danger Comes as he goes. The



The Beach of White Sand

PCs may see his eyestalks there later, along with Humms's and Graalk's.

Muumph of Five Legs: INT average; AL N; AC 4; MV 9, swim 6; HD 3; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1-6/1-6; SZ M (6'11" tall); ML 11; XP 65; MM/47.

Unless otherwise noted, all crabmen have statistics similar to Muumph's.

5. Refectory. The monks met here to eat communally twice a day. Now the interior is filled with sand lightly covering the charred boards of the original timber floor. Any valuables were stolen by pirates long ago.

The remnants of floorboards cover a 2'-deep hole where two more crabmen, a female named **Humms** (hp 13) and a young male named **Graalk** (hp 14), have set up temporary quarters. If the PCs explore during daylight, the duo are asleep and only their eyestalks show above their sandy burrow. If startled, they erupt through the charred floor and make for the exit.

At night, Graalk is serenading a seemingly disinterested Humms, who is foraging about the floor, spitting out sand pellets as she goes. In the crabman language, Graalk is singing:

"Oh Humms of Green Shell,
Humms the beautiful,
Humms of the Beach of White Sand,
Oh Humms of bright eyes,
Humms the green,
Humms the beautiful."

As he sings, Graalk changes color from a dull orange to deep red, then back to orange again. He also opens and closes his claws to the beat and throws wide his arms to emphasize a note. (All in all, Graalk is more ham than crustacean. Humms knows this but will still lay 100 or so eggs in the ocean when Year's-End Walk is over, making Graalk a daddy.)

An iron box lies buried in the western corner of the floor, opposite the entrance and so far undiscovered by the crabmen. It is twisted slightly—distorted even in the sand by the heat of the burning building—so a blow of at least 3 hp damage is needed to open the container.

Inside, the PCs find a piece of melted gold with a few semiprecious stones stuck here and there. This lump was once a ceremonial bowl of great value. Now it will fetch only 300 gp for scrap. If pried out of their fused setting, the gems are worth 20 gp (×5), 10 gp (×3), and 5 gp (×10). Subtract the gem values from the overall value if they are removed.

6. Occupied Sand Dune. Ruuchk's assistant in the Year's-End Rites, a female named **Quaacl** (INT 10; hp 21), is presently hiding in this sand dune, her eyestalks keeping watch around her though they are almost invisible behind vegetation. She has sat here for two nights and a day, composing a speech she will make on the last day of the migration.

Though each crabman is independent and spends the day as he or she pleases, Quaacl is acknowledged as the military leader of the Tribe. She will stay put in the dune (imposing a −5 penalty on the adventurers' surprise roll) watching the PCs' progress through the ruins. Unlike ordinary Tribe members, if Quaacl sees the adventurers attack a crabman she goes to its aid, sounding a rallying cry (the Alarm of Use Your Claws). The DM can check each crabman's morale to see if those nearby respond. Those making the roll come to Quaacl's call; those failing stay in hiding.

Quaacl wears a chain around her right ankle made of iron spikes bent into links. The spikes were taken from the antiquarians' stores. A ring made of gold is fastened on the upper pincer of her right middle (fine manipulation) claw. Quaacl found this *ring of free action* on the beach during last Year's-End Walk. It may have belonged to a pirate, one of the long-dead monks, a shipwrecked sailor, or one of the pilgrims to the shrine.

If Quaacl is attacked with a *web, hold,* or *slow* spell, the magic has no effect. The ring allows humans to move and attack freely even underwater (though it doesn't allow nonaquatic or nonmarine creatures to breathe water).

A *ring of free action* allows individuals to move in water at normal (surface) speed. Quaacl already moves 9 when walking and 6 when swimming, so her swimming rate is improved to 9 when she wears the ring. The ring also allows its wearer to wield cutting and smashing weapons underwater without restrictions, so long as the weapon is held rather than hurled. For a full description of the *ring of free action*, see the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide,* page 148.

7. The Strand. A small embankment overlooks the cream-colored strand that gives the Beach of White Sand its name. At any time, 2-16 crabmen are actively foraging among storm jetsam: driftwood, seaweed, shells, dead fish, and one or two whole trees recently washed up.

If the DM rolls 2d8 and gets a result less than 16, the remaining crabmen are resting nearby in the dunes, buried with only their eyestalks showing. For example: The DM rolls a 12 on 2d8; 12 crabmen are on the beach. This means that four crabmen are resting nearby.

If the adventurers approach from the sea, whether by boat or as a test of Quaacl's *ring of free action,* the crabmen on the beach do not run away but hesitantly move to push the PCs back into the water. They are peaceful by nature, but will attack the PCs if they don't cooperate in going back to sea. The ancient agreement between the Tribe's ancestors and Abbot Norntal stated that, in return for being left alone at Year's-End Walk, the crabmen should prevent all seaborne landings. Though this was intended to keep pirates at bay, the treaty—in the form of their Scroll of Out-of-Shell People—is such a part of the Tribe's laws that they still keep to its particulars. Adventurers coming from the shore are not attacked; the nervous crabmen scuttle away from these as before.

All the crabmen here have statistics identical to those of Muumph in area 4, with random numbers of hit points.

8. Abbot's House. The abbot of the monastery had the luxury of a two-room dwelling with a turf roof. This roof remained intact until it was washed away by the powerful waves that uncovered the area, so the interior of this building is well preserved.

Inside, the adventurers find a small study with a table and single chair. Along the dividing wall a wicker shelf has sagged floorward, depositing its contents onto the sand.

PCs who read the three almost-intact books will discover that they were written by hand in an old dialect of the common tongue. The first is a prayer book for followers of a deity named Turtur. Adventurers can make their own connections between this minor deity and present-day reverence of the druidic Turburt. The book is worth 50 gp to an antiquarian with an interest in religious history.

The second book is a discussion of ancient clerical spells that resemble modern types. A priest who examines this book finds a description of the spell *pass without trace.* This page can be used as a regular scroll by a cleric. It's written at the 6th level of ability for purposes of determining casting success, duration, etc. The book is worth about 20 gp; it doesn't relate much that a priest wouldn't already know.

The third book is a bestiary—a book cataloguing and describing creatures both mundane and monstrous. The book isn't very accurate (it even has some multi-limbed, many-headed creatures that never existed) but it is a curiosity. The entry labeled "Crabbmen" shows a gangly, squinting, evil-looking creature only vaguely similar to members of the Tribe. The author writes:

"Crabbmen are a foul cross between men and giant crabs, brought about by sorcerous experiments. The specimens escaped and multiplied along coasts, where they are prey to many creatures. Their flesh is said to be pink and tasty when cooked.

"The beasts are mindless and without social structure. They swarm from place to place following their instinctive blood lust, eating all creatures they find, even men, and are to be avoided except by stout warriors in large numbers."

A different hand made the following marginal note:

"They are organized and seem intelligent. A leader directs them. Certain spells are useful for communication, though patience is needed. They run and hide on encountering humans."

The bestiary has more value if sold to an unlearned NPC likely to believe its contents rather than a sage who will discount most of it. It is worth 100 gp to a gullible but rich customer, 50 gp to a sage.

As the adventurers explore the study, they hear a heavy creak from the adjoining room, a bedroom. Heroes who peek around the open doorway see the bed is bowed beneath the weight of something large that has thrown a blanket over itself. A pair of crabman pincers grip the edge of the blanket.

This is Caarocct, a junior member of the Tribe. His eyes are tightly closed and he hopes the PCs will go away if he ignores them.

The crabman remains perfectly still until the adventurers leave the building or try to harm him. He then makes all speed for the exit and runs off into the safety of the dunes, practicing the Alarm of Danger Comes.

Caarocct is on his first Year's-End Walk and is excited with the newness of it all. His shell is somewhat softer than that of an adult, his growth not having yet reached the proportions of his larger relatives.

A corner of the bedroom holds an iron chest that was broken open in the final pirate raid. A thin layer of sand inside conceals the chest's false bottom. If the panel is opened, the PCs find a Certificate of Office that reads:

> In Honor of Brother Norntal,
> Appointed Abbot of
> White Sand Monastery
> In the Holy Name of Turtur.
> Dated this 21st day of Halapur, 4190.

The calendar used in the days of the monastery differs from the modern one, but anyone proficiency in ancient history, local history, ancient languages, or even astrology can make a successful proficiency check to determine that Norntal was installed as abbot about a century ago.

Caarocct the Pliable: INT low; AL N; AC 7; MV 9, swim 6; HD 2+2; hp 8; THAC0 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4/1-4; SZ M (5'8" tall); ML 10; XP 65; MM/47.

9. Scriptorium. The stones themselves cracked from the heat of the fire that destroyed this building. Inside, the adventurers find charred timbers, the ash of many leather-covered books, and the fragmented skeletons of five monks who sought to rescue their monastery's greatest treasures. None are identifiable (it was, after all, a century ago when they died) but Norntal died here vainly defending the scriptorium, where books were written, copied, and stored.

Two crabmen, **Yicctii** (hp 17; ML 14), a black-colored female, and **Tuunaa** (hp 16), a yellow-brown male, are sifting hopefully through the cinders. There is little here to eat, but Yicctii found a shining amulet that she has placed around what passes for her neck.

If the PCs speak audibly within 50' of her, Yicctii will be amazed to find she can understand them, for this was Norntal's *amulet of comprehension,* the very item that aided his communication with the crabmen long ago.

An *amulet of comprehension* duplicates the effects of the first-level wizard spell *comprehend languages* with slight modifications. It can be used by any sentient being, regardless of class or profession, who possesses ears or other organs that hear sound (for spoken languages) or eyes (for written texts). The wearer need not be literate to read written words, and he does not need to touch the creature listened to or the writing to comprehend it. Like the spell, the amulet's powers can be blocked by certain types of warding magic (the third-level *secret page* and *illusionary script* spells) and it does not reveal messages concealed in otherwise normal text.

The amulet works continually for one hour when a person first puts it on, then by concentration thereafter. (The wearer must concentrate on a spoken language or a written piece to comprehend it. Comprehension is not casually imparted. For example, in a crowded bazaar the wearer does not comprehend all voices in the babble, but can concentrate on one or two at a time.)

When first discovered, a typical *amulet of comprehension* has 10d10+10 charges. (This one has 26.) Such amulets can be recharged up to their maximum at a cost of 50 gp per charge. The suggested experience-point value for making such an item is 3,000 XP.

The DM should demonstrate the amulet's power through Yicctii's reactions to the PCs' conversation. She is less shy than other members of the Tribe (she is Ruuchk's sister and shares some of his outgoing nature) and will hang around a little distance from the PCs, looking at what they are doing.

If someone says, "Let's look at the beach," Yicctii turns in that direction. If one says, "I think there's a crabman in that dune," she looks over there too, and so on. Obviously, if Yicctii overhears the PCs discussing some cataclysmic method of dealing with the Tribe, she will sound the Alarm of Danger Comes and alert the crabmen to their peril. But if the adventurers seem mostly harmless, Yicctii simply watches and listens.

The PCs should realize they can communicate with Yicctii and use her as a translator. While she can understand their speech (even if they switch from Common to converse privately in dwarvish, gnomish, elvish, or whatever), she cannot speak any language but that of the crabmen. If a PC speaks, **she can translate his speech into the crabman language, passing on the information to others of her kind.**

The best thing adventurers can say to Yicctii is something like "Take us to your leader!" She will oblige by looking for Ruuchk at area 10. Of course, if the PCs slay Yicctii and capture the amulet, they can understand the crabmen's language themselves, but responding in kind remains a problem. In any case, Ruuchk will not be hospitable to adventurers who have attacked any member of the Tribe.

Tuunaa, the male, is a typical crabman who shares the Tribe's fear of strangers. He will not intervene if Yicctii is attacked, fighting only in self-defense or under orders from Ruuchk or Quaacl. He scoots away into the sands at the earliest opportunity.

10. The Temple. This T-shaped building was once the center of worship for the monastery. Now Ruuchk of the Blue Shell, the leader of the band of crabmen, has converted it into a temporary dwelling. Ruuchk is at home 50% of the time; otherwise he is foraging.

The temple's interior is a tangle of

fallen masonry and timbers, bulldozed aside by the crabman to form a zigzagging path into the interior. Two man-sized creatures can walk abreast on this trail. The debris has a cumulative 30% chance per round of collapsing and inflicting 1-6 hp damage to anyone climbing over it.

In the inner sanctum at the east end of the building, Ruuchk has built a likeness of the Great Crab, the deity the crabmen revere. Skillfully assembled from wire, spikes, chain, shovel-heads, two picks, a long sword, and oddments of armor, the entire work is highly polished and shows great workmanship and beauty. If the adventurers could obtain the sculpture (intended to be sunk in Mother Ocean at the culmination of Year's-End Rites) they could get as much as 900 gp for it in any large town. The crabmen will be very angry if the statue is taken, however, and may never trust humans again.

Of greater significance, perhaps, is that Ruuchk places the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People in the claws of the sculpture for safe-keeping while he sleeps nearby. A thief could obtain the sacred scroll without Ruuchk's knowledge by making a successful Move Silently roll. When he sallies forth to forage or to scavenge enemies, Ruuchk carries the scroll with him as a symbol of office. The scroll is sealed in a watertight ivory scroll case worth 100 gp.

Ruuchk became Tribe Mover (the chieftain of the Tribe) on the death of his father, Auuck, who had taught him his duties. Ruuchk's sister, Yicctii, likewise knows the ceremonies expected of a Tribe Mover and will inherit the position if Ruuchk dies.

His titles of Goods Carrier, Sea Talker, Scavenger of the Beached Beast, and Finder of Buried Metal Shells have been earned through experience. Ruuchk is Goods Carrier because he brings the scroll with him everywhere. He is Sea Talker because he addresses Mother Ocean and the Great Crab in the Tribal Rites. (See the "Crabman Biology" sidebar.) He is known as the Scavenger of the Beached Beast from the time he discovered the remains of a giant squid washed up on the shore during one memorable Year's-End Walk when all the Tribe feasted. The title of Finder of Buried Metal Shells refers to when he uncovered a huckster's takings, buried in a hole. The unfortunate huckster, who had followed the pilgrims to the Shrine of Turburt to turn a profit, had buried his money for safe-keeping but couldn't find it again. Ruuchk did, and he still wears about 100 sp on a chain around his waist.

Ruuchk is responsible for ensuring that the Year's-End Rites proceed properly. This includes the provision that no humans can be present. If he discovers that more Out-of-Shell People have arrived (people in armor would be called In-Shell Out-of-Shell People) he becomes agitated and goes to determine their numbers and whether they came from land or sea. If they came from the sea, Ruuchk is obliged to drive them back to honor the treaty.

If the PCs have discovered Ruuchk's sister, Yicctii (see area 9), and know that she can understand them, they can have a one-sided conversation with the crabman leader, using Yicctii as translator from the PCs to Ruuchk only. If they captured the *amulet of comprehension,* the adventurers can understand Ruuchk but cannot reply to him. Ruuchk's main concerns are as follows:

1. Why do Out-of-Shell People return to the Beach of White Sand when the chanting is over and when Ruuchk has waved the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People to signal Year's-End Walk?

2. Do they not realize that All Things Outside the Round Stones (which the crabmen in these latter days interpret as the Shrine of Turburt, but which originally meant the monastery walls) and Down To The Sea are the Tribe's, and that the Bargain says the Great Crab would be angry if the Tribe did not keep all Out-of-Shell People away who come from the sea?

3. Isn't it a fact that Out-of-Shell People agreed that those on land will not disturb the Tribe during Sky-Darkening Season, even as the Tribe does not disturb the Out-of-Shell People during their chantings at the Round Stones?

The Tribe Mover and his heir know the treaty scroll in its crabman translation by heart. Up to now, no crabmen could read it, though Yicctii may do so using her amulet. If the adventurers ask for a recitation or get their hands on the crabman's copy of the treaty, hand the players a copy of the scroll shown on page 23.

This document is signed by Abbot Norntal and bears a shaky mandible-mark made by Zitticck, the leader of the Tribe at the time. The duplicate scroll kept by the abbot was destroyed in the fire that burned down the scriptorium.

Ruuchk of the Blue Shell, Tribe Mover, Goods Carrier, Sea Talker, Scavenger of the Beached Beast, Finder of Buried Metal Shells: INT average (10); AL (L)N; AC 4; MV 9, swim 9; HD 3; hp 24; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1-6/1-6; SZ L (10' tall); ML 12; XP 65; MM/47.

Negotiating a Settlement

It will take careful diplomacy to negotiate with the crabmen. The main difficulty lies in communication. Yicctii will not willingly part with her *amulet of comprehension,* though she may be persuaded to lend it to the party for a short time if she is given a large enough bribe of food and

Crabman Biology

Crabmen are extremely reluctant to discuss their reproductive habits, even with each other. It is an embarrassment to them that their beloved children are abandoned at conception, the defenseless larvae left to survive as best they can in the perilous sea.

The Tribal Rites performed during Year's-End-Walk are prayers to Mother Ocean that her currents will bring the larvae safely to the Tribe's living grounds come summer. The intensity of light during Sun Burning Season affects crabmen hormonally, so that they become extremely maternal or paternal and can instinctively recognize their own offspring when the young ones crawl out of the ocean. Ocean predators limit the number of surviving larvae each year to about two per parent, but some adult crabmen breed for several years before any of their own offspring survive the rigors of the sea. The parenting instinct is so strong that an adult without a crabchild to care for will try to adopt noncrabman travelers or sunbathers.

This seasonal change makes crabmen less xenophobic than usual—indeed, it encourages them to approach strangers as they are overwhelmed by parental instinct. Unfortunately, their biological drives leave the crabmen vulnerable to attack by sahuagin and others. It is therefore no accident that it was summertime when the sahuagin raided Ruuchk's ancestors, precipitating the sack of Norntal's monastery.

Know Ye that this document is a Sacred Treaty effected between Abbot Norntal, leader of the monks of White Sand Monastery, and Zitticck, Chieftain of the Tribe of crabbmen who live on these coasts.

Be it known that henceforth and forever the Tribe is granted a Concession that they shall have Right of Way on the beach of White Sand outside the monastery walls, called the Round Stones by the crabbmen, even down to the sea, to use as they will for fourteen nights following the winter solstice and including that night, and for the pursuance of their religious activities in marking the end of the year as reckoned by them on their own calendar.

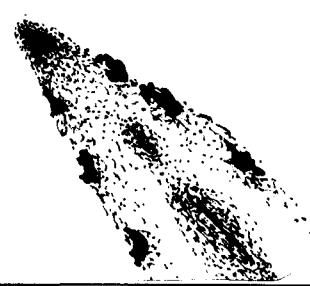
Henceforth it will be considered a trespass to use the beach of White Sand or its environs by human beings, known to the Tribe as Out-of-Shell People, during the time of the Tribe's Concession.

In return for this Concession, the Tribe agrees to suffer no one who emerges onto the shore by boat, other vessel, or by other means from the sea, such as pirates that have plagued this coast at this season in other years. The Tribe, however, shall spare humans who come with messages or supplies by land, or who visit in need or ignorance from land.

We humans warrant that we shall vacate the shore for fourteen nights, commencing on the night of the winter solstice, and the Tribe agrees to wait until such vacation has been made before moving into the area to avoid accidental hurt or loss to either race.

We, the undersigned, agree to be legally bound in the names of our respective deities, the Holy Turtur of our monastery, and The Great Crab who dwells in Mother Ocean of the crabbmen. One copy of this document shall be preserved by each party to maintain this bargain for all time.

Abbot Norntal



shiny metal. The amulet must be handed from humans to crabmen and back again to understand each side. (Norntal was lucky enough to be granted *tongues* spells for his negotiations.)

If the PCs attempt to use sign language or pictograms, make the players act out the encounter. If the DM can understand the players, there's a chance that Ruuchk can too. Remember that communication between crabmen and humans has always been difficult, and even learned sages have managed to understand only a few basic crabman words. The DM can roll an Intelligence check for Ruuchk to see if he can make sense of the PCs' signs or pictures.

A compromise can be worked out if communication can be established. First, the adventurers can point out that the "Round Stones" the crabmen have assumed meant the Shrine of Turburt were actually the outer walls of the settlement. Convincing Ruuchk of this will create a reason for the crabmen to leave the ruins, letting the antiquarians return to conduct their studies. Second, the adventurers can advise the sages that the crabmen must not be disturbed in their comings and goings on the beach. Because the antiquarians will return by land, they will not be molested by the Tribe as long as the crabmen aren't attacked. The earlier conflict erupted because Ruuchk went to explain the situation as he understood it but was struck by the frightened antiquarians.

Concluding the Adventure

If the party kills all the crabmen or drives them away, the PCs have completed their mission and will be awarded the king's 500 gp (or 650 gp, if they haggled). However, the DM should have a copy of the Scroll of Out-of-Shell People come to light during the antiquarians' dig and award only half the experience-point total because the PCs failed to find a peaceful solution. After the fact that the crabmen were intelligent, civilized folk with ancient customs leaks out, the party will also find that the locals fear them and offer only a cool welcome. Good-aligned PCs may require some form of quest for atonement before they can advance a level.

If the adventurers complete the mission with a minimum of bloodshed and negotiate a compromise acceptable to both sides, they will be hailed as heroes. An award of 1,000-1,500 XP can be divided between those responsible for a successful resolution, at the DM's option.

If the PCs are truly forward-thinking diplomats, they may negotiate a new treaty providing the king with crabman allies. In this case, the king doubles the promised reward, and the DM should award an additional 400 XP, to be split among the negotiators.

Further Adventures

A few possibilities are open to the PCs if they wish to remain in the area of the

Continued on page 47

Fantasy, Phantasms and Fright! ...the Adventure never stops!

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THE OBJECT OF DESIRE

BY GARY O'CONNELL AND LUCYA SZACHNOWSKI

Who has won the heart of a beholder?

Artwork by David Day

Gary and Lucya both live in London, where Lucya is the assistant editor of Games and Puzzles, *a British magazine covering all areas of gaming from chess to role-playing. In 1993, Lucya was the European AD&D® champion and won a trip to the 1994* GEN CON® *game fair in the USA. Gary is a computer games designer for Argonaut Software, the creators of* Starfox *for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. He is currently working on a major adventure game for Microsoft due for release in late 1995. The original draft of this adventure was the European Open Competition at Euro GEN CON game fair in 1992.*

"The Object of Desire" is a D&D® adventure written in the tradition of the *Arabian Nights.* This adventure is intended for a party of 4-6 predominantly good-aligned PCs of levels 5-8 (about 35 total levels), including at least one cleric (whom the DM should try to keep alive, if possible, for much of the adventure).

The scenario begins with a sea voyage between two caliphates. The PCs should be on good terms with one of the ruling caliphs or have been recommended by a former patron of high status. Within this module, the caliphates are called Sasan and Samarkand, but the DM may substitute different cities and other patrons to suit the campaign.

Many of the NPCs in this scenario use Arabic-style weapons such as the scimitar (a medium-length curved sword) and the jambiya (a curved double-edged dagger). The DM should use statistics for a normal sword and a normal dagger respectively. Most humans wear light armor or no armor due to the intensity of the heat in this region. Anything heavier than leather armor incurs an attack penalty of −1 per point of armor class lower than AC 7. Shields do not add to the penalty.

Several of the creatures encountered in this adventure are more fully described in the *Creature Catalog,* but enough information is given here to run the adventure.

For the Player Characters

The PCs begin the adventure in the Caliphate of Sasan, where they are asked to undertake a most delicate mission for Caliph Farouk. If the PCs are not yet acquainted with the caliph, they have been recommended to him by a former patron.

You have been commissioned by Caliph Farouk of Sasan to escort his niece, the lovely Princess Yasmin, and her dowry west to Samarkand. There she will marry her beloved Prince Harith, to whom she has been betrothed for several years. As the caliph cannot attend the wedding, due to many pressing matters of state, he wishes to entrust Yasmin's safety to people he can rely on. Yasmin will be accompanied by her maid, Fatima, and the caliph's own cousin and vizier, Mustafa al-Wazah.

The voyage will take about five days and nights along the coast of the Algarin, an inhospitable stretch of burning deserts that only the foolish or the desperate would travel across by land. You have been granted the use of the caliph's own dhow and must be vigilant for pirates and hostile sea monsters that are known to trouble this region.

The Caliph's Dhow

The caliph's dhow is a 70'-long, 20'-wide ship with two masts and a crow's nest. The prow is decorated with a magical figurehead that can run up the sails on command. With this assistance, the ship needs only a small crew: only four on this voyage, plus the captain. The dhow carries a six-man skiff for going ashore.

The captain's cabin (the only cabin on the ship) has been prepared for the princess, and the captain will rest with his men. A cot has been brought in for Yasmin's maid. Hammocks for the PCs and crew are strung in the hold, above the ship's stores: two weeks' firewood, food and water to last 14 people a month, a chest with the captain's navigation instruments and charts, a spare sail, and plenty of hemp rope. On deck, a 4' × 6' fish locker holds nets and three barrels of fish.

Jamil, captain: AC 5; F4; hp 20; MV 120' (40'); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; S 16, I 11, W 9, D 15, C 14, Ch 12; Save F4; ML 9; AL L; leather armor, shield, scimitar.

Rachim, first mate: AC 8; F1; hp 7; MV 120' (40'); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; D 14; Save F1; ML 8; AL L; scimitar.

Kassim, sailor: AC 9; hp 5; other statistics and equipment as Rachim.

Omar, cook: AC 9; 0-level human; hp 4; MV 120' (40'); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; Save Normal Man; ML 8; AL L; club.

Ali, cabin boy: AC 8; hp 2; D 14; ML 6; AL N; jambiya; other statistics as Omar.

For the Dungeon Master

Once upon a time, the handsome Sultan Firouz al-Algarin had a wondrous magical mirror that could show him his heart's desire and, on command, transport him to the place where it lay. Gazing into the mirror, he saw Aurelia, the daughter of a powerful mage. Such was her beauty that he fell in love with her at first sight. He used the mirror to visit her, and she reciprocated his love.

Unfortunately her father, Nazir al-Azrad, was as evil as he was powerful. When Firouz convinced Aurelia to elope with him, Nazir followed the couple to the sultan's court. There he found the two lovers about to be wed and flew into a dreadful rage. He slew the cleric about to marry the lovers, and used his potent magic to transform Firouz into a beholder. Finally, he turned on his daughter and in his rage transformed her into a crystal statue, which he *teleported* to his hidden fortress.

Firouz was unable to cope with the shock of seeing his beloved so badly used, on top of his own transformation into such an abhorrent creature. He lost all memory of what he once was and became, in truth, a fearful monster. He used his terrible gaze against all who came near him. Soon his magnificent and thronging court was but an empty reflection of what it had once been, with the beholder as lord of nothing.

Following some unconscious yearning, the beholder turned his eyes to his magnificent mirror, but his heart had grown mean and shallow with his madness, thus limiting the range of his vision. For many weeks he saw nothing, until at last a beautiful nomad woman was revealed to him. Responding to some deep feeling of loss, the beholder captured and *charmed* her and kept her as a beautiful object to gaze upon. Years passed and the woman's looks began to fade. The beholder again used his mirror to seek out the fairest in the land; once another woman was secured, he petrified his former love to preserve her remaining beauty forever. Many years went by, and the beholder's halls filled with statues as his heart grew lonelier.

The caliph's dhow passes the coastline of the desert of Algarin, where the beholder's palace lies, just as Firouz gazes once more into his mirror to seek a new and beautiful companion.

Setting Out to Sea

The PCs are awaiting the arrival of the princess at the caliph's dhow. Read or paraphrase the following to the players when they are ready to begin the adventure:

It's a fine morning and many ships are in the harbor, which bustles with noise and activity. Swaggering sailors and hunch-shouldered porters, sun-bronzed travelers and street-grimed urchins, fat-bellied traders and thin-ribbed beggars, all go about their business amid the throng. The air is filled with the sounds of haggling, the cries of sea gulls, and the creaking of rope. Supplies are being loaded aboard your ship: barrels of salted fish, meat, and dried fruit together with skins of water and wine.

You are waiting on the quayside when Princess Yasmin arrives with much pomp and ceremony, carried on a veiled litter borne on the shoulders of four strong men. The litter is accompanied by a haughty man dressed in the robes of a vizier, a plump maid, and four guards carrying a large chest containing the princess's dowry. The litter and chest are set down in front of the ship.

One of the bearers parts the curtains of the litter, revealing the beautiful Princess Yasmin. Her clothes are finest silk and her face is obscured by a veil of shimmering gold that emphasizes her deep-brown eyes.

Princess Yasmin is 17 years old, beautiful, demure, and faithful to her true love. She has had a very sheltered upbringing and is the perfect princess. During the voyage, she will spend much of the time in her cabin with her maid. She does not feel it is appropriate to talk more than necessary with those of low station such as the crew—perhaps even the PCs. As soon as Yasmin has boarded the ship, the guards bring her dowry aboard, then return to the palace along with the bearers who carry her empty litter.

The haughty man introduces himself as Mustafa al-Wazah, vizier and cousin of the caliph. Mustafa announces that he will accompany the PCs to chaperon Princess Yasmin. He asks where the princess's cabin is situated and orders the PCs to place the large chest there. Mustafa then demands to be shown his own cabin and is most offended that he

has not been allocated one. It would not be appropriate for him to share Yasmin's cabin, but the PCs could rig up a tent on the deck if Mustafa insists on separate quarters.

The vizier is an arrogant and pompous fool of high authority but little actual ability. He is a diplomatic envoy to Samarkand as well as the princess's chaperon. The PCs will probably learn to despise him.

The large chest containing Yasmin's dowry is gold-plated, weighs 75 lbs., and has two carrying handles set with fire opals (total value 5,400 gp). The chest has three steel locks of fine quality (−15% to thieves' open-locks rolls), and Mustafa holds the keys. Each of the three locks was made by a different craftsman and requires a separate open-locks rolls to unlock.

The chest holds two pouches, each containing 150 pp; a third bag containing 42 gems (100 gp (×15), 250 gp (×15), 500 gp (×10), 1,000 gp, 1,200 gp); and 13 loose pieces of jewelry (total value 8,810 gp). PCs who dare open the chest without Yasmin's permission will be dealt with harshly.

Princess Yasmin: AC 8; 0-level human; hp 4; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; Save Normal Man; S 9, I 12, W 15, D 15, C 11, Ch 17; ML 9; AL L; unarmed.

Fatima: AC 9; hp 3; ML 7; jambiya; other statistics as Yasmin.

Mustafa al-Wazah: AC 8; M2; hp 7; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg by spell or weapon type; S 9, I 16, W 11, D 13, C 10, Ch 10; Save M2; ML 3; AL L; jambiya. Spells: *charm person, floating disc.*

Litter bearers (4): AC 9; hp 6 each; S 14 (+1/+1); AL N; jambiya; other statistics as Yasmin.

Guards (4): AC 6; F2; hp 12 each; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; D 14; Save F2; ML 10; AL L; leather armor, scimitar.

Many people have gathered for the spectacle of Yasmin's departure, among them a filthy beggar who steps forward and persistently entreats the PCs for money. The beggar is of indeterminate age, wears only a loincloth and sandals, and carries a small wooden bowl. The vizier takes the man's mere presence as an insult and demands that the beggar be flogged for his impudence. Yasmin's departing guards move in to seize the beggar, but the PCs can persuade Mustafa not to carry out his threat.

The beggar is Mahmoud, a local mystic. He offers the PCs a cryptic prophecy, as either thanks or reproach depending on his treatment. The ragged man closes his eyes and intones, "Do not let your eyes deceive you. Much evil is but madness or folly, and desire but a prison for the soul."

The mystic then limps off and is lost in the crowd. PCs trying to catch up to the beggar are unable to distinguish him from the myriad of other faces in the horde of spectators.

Mahmoud: AC 6; Mys4; hp 20; MV 150′ (50′); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1; SA heal self, awareness; Save Mystic 4; ML 11; AL L; unarmed.

The Voyage

While the ship is under way, someone must always man the tiller, which is situated over the cabin. Close maneuvers such as docking must be handled by an experienced sailor. All the crew except Ali are sufficiently skilled. Wind and weather conditions will be favorable for the entire journey, allowing the ship to make good headway. Read the following to the players to set the scene:

> With good wind in her sails the dhow heads south, skimming the coast as gulls follow her wake. The sky is clear, and there is a light swell in the sea.

Vizier Trouble

The passage would be smooth were it not for Mustafa. Almost as soon as the ship leaves port, Mustafa claims that he is feeling seasick. Although he looks perfectly healthy, he groans and complains incessantly about the motion of the ship and demands that a cleric in the party cure him. He insists that the PCs do something to stop the vessel's rocking. If the party's cleric has not received a *cure disease* spell, the vizier berates him loudly, shouting, "You selfish priest! You only thought to look after yourself, while I writhe in agony with a djinni in my belly!"

The princess does not feel it is her place to involve herself in the affairs of an older member of her family. She keeps out of any arguments. If a PC asks her to intervene, she says, "It is not my place to reprimand my father's vizier."

After a couple of hours, Mustafa recovers naturally as he gets his sea legs, by which time he has found something else to complain about. Now he is unable to find his best silk slippers and accuses a thief PC of stealing them. Mustafa claims that:

> "While I was dying on deck, that felonious dog was rifling through my belongings and stealing my best silk slippers! My best, mind you! They were a present from the Queen of Shebal—a ruler who knew my worth. I demand justice!"

It will take a lot to convince Mustafa that the PC he has accused is innocent. The slippers are misplaced inside Mustafa's luggage, but he will not readily allow anyone to search his possessions unless the PCs are very diplomatic.

A supper of spiced meats and bread is served on deck at sunset (although the princess eats in her cabin). Mustafa objects to the quality of the food, although everyone else finds it excellent. There are no other planned events until the following afternoon. At that time, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The journey continues uneventfully the next morning. To the west, you can make out the inhospitable cliffs of Algarin. The princess takes a stroll around deck in the morning, often glancing toward Samarkand and her true love.

Snakes Alive!

During the late afternoon, a 20′-long giant sea snake approaches the ship (2-in-6 chance of spotting it from the crow's nest). The snake slithers up the ship's figurehead and onto the deck. The princess screams and flees to her cabin as soon as the snake rears its head. After the snake takes 40 hp damage, it slips back into the sea and swims away.

Giant sea snake (1): AC 6; HD 10* (L); hp 55; MV 90′ (30′); #AT 1 bite; Dmg 2d4 plus poison (death in 1d4+2 turns unless save is successful); Save F5; ML 7; INT 2; AL N; XP 1,750; RC/204 (modified).

The mere sight of the snake sends the princess to her cabin for the rest of the day. She will allow no one inside except Fatima and female PCs of high station.

Bird of Ill Omen

Soon after the sea snake incident, a raven approaches the ship and makes a nuisance of itself. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

A black bird with shiny feathers and a sharp black beak swoops across the deck from the starboard bow. It caws loudly and insistently, circling the mast. After a while, it perches high in the rigging and continues to caw.

The raven lands out of reach but only a few feet away from the crow's nest. It is possible to climb the rigging to the bird's location, but it hops from perch to perch at the PCs' approach. The raven remains for half an hour or until caught or scared off. If offered food, the bird lands on someone's shoulder and stays with that person for the rest of the day.

This is an ordinary raven and is interested only in fish. Feel free to encourage whatever misinterpretation the players want to put on the creature: odd behavior, listening to conversations, etc.

Raven: AC 8; HD ¼ (S); hp 2; MV fly 330′ (110′); #AT 1 (peck); Dmg 1; Save Normal Man; ML 5; INT 2; AL N; XP 5; CC/86.

Kidnapped!

Throughout the day, the ship continues to hug the coastline, carefully avoiding the cliffs and offshore reefs that make the coast of Algarin hazardous. Hidden from view behind the cliffs lies the palace of Firouz the beholder. As the party's dhow continues its westward trek, the beholder gazes into his *mirror of desire* (see sidebar) and sees Princess Yasmin in her cabin. Entranced by her beauty, the beholder sends three of his gargoyles to cause a diversion while he uses the powers of his mirror to kidnap Yasmin himself.

Firouz's gargoyles approach underwater from the cliffs several miles away. Having no need to breathe, and using their wings for propulsion, they may remain undetected until they surface beside the boat. The setting sun's reflection on the water partially blinds the lookout, giving anyone in the crow's nest only a 1-in-8 chance to spot the gargoyles before they emerge. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

A gray-winged creature with stony skin erupts from the foam in front of the prow, and two more burst out of the sea on either side. Flicking their wings, they swoop toward the deck, claws outstretched to attack.

The gargoyles' sudden appearance has a 2-in-6 chance to surprise those on deck. Neither Captain Jamil nor his crew can hurt the gargoyles; the seamen have no magical weapons. Mustafa wastes the first round. His mouth falls open but he utters nothing; he merely points ineffectually at the ugly monsters. When he comes to his senses, the vizier tries to *charm* a PC to protect him.

Gargoyles (3): AC 5; HD 4** (L); hp 26, 23, 19; MV 90′ (30′), fly 150′ (50′); #AT 2 claws/1 bite/1 horn; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6/1d4; Save F8; ML 11; INT 5; AL C; XP 175; RC/178. Spells or magical weapons are required to hit gargoyles. They are not affected by *sleep* or *charm* spells.

This attack is intended to keep the party distracted while the beholder makes his bid to kidnap the princess from her cabin. Seconds later (but in the same round), a brilliant flash of light surrounds the princess and blinds anyone watching her (save vs. spells or go blind for 1-10 rounds; blindness for only one round on successful save). Princess Yasmin screams and immediately vanishes, replaced by a ball of scintillating light that flies out of the ship ignoring all physical impediments. Only those not blinded by the flash see the sphere shooting toward the northern cliffs like a comet.

The beholder appears in the flash but cannot be seen through the intense light. (See sidebar on page 34 for details.) Though a few PCs may be able to see the course of Firouz's ball of light, no one can catch up with it—it moves at incredible speed. The gargoyles remain behind for three rounds or until one of them is destroyed. Then they flap off toward the northern cliffs following the same course as the ball of light. If the PCs were blinded or too distracted to notice the radiant sphere, the party can easily follow the gargoyles. If the PCs pursue by magical flight, they can follow the gargoyles all the way to Firouz's palace and avoid the perils of the "Sea Caves." Proceed directly to "The Qal'at of Firouz al-Algarin."

If the PCs follow the ball of light or the gargoyles by boat, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You sail on as the sun sinks beneath the horizon. To the north lies a jagged, rocky coastline. In the last evening light you can see waves crashing over hidden reefs just below the surface. From the pattern of the waves, you can make out extensive coral beds that will be hazardous to navigate in the failing light.

The coast is very rocky; approaching at night with no light but the stars would be perilous. Jamil is very reluctant to continue. He insists on dropping anchor here until dawn. If the PCs insist that the ship press on, they soon hear the dhow's hull scrape the rocks and feel the ship shudder as it runs aground on a reef. It will take several hours' work to free the boat, which must be done before the tide goes out or the dhow will capsize as the water level lowers.

If the PCs decide to use the skiff, they can inch through the reefs to the lagoon beyond, provided they have at least one skilled seaman on board. (Jamil and Rachim will volunteer.) Once they reach the lagoon, the PCs can use intense light sources (such as a hooded lantern or *continual light* spell) to see the black shingle beach (area 1).

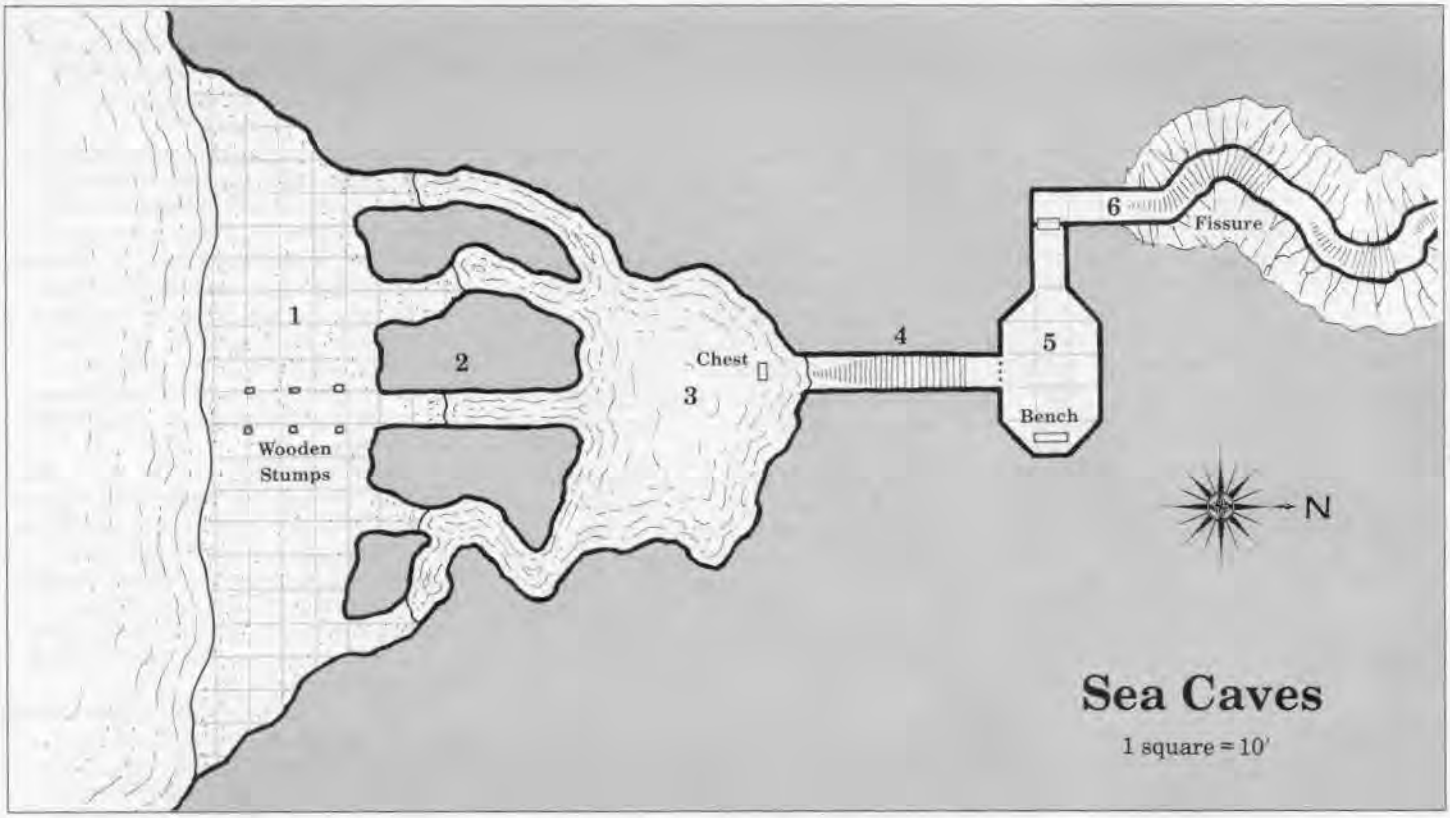
Jamil will insist that at least two able seamen remain on board the dhow. Mustafa will not accompany the party to the shore. He generously offers to guard the dhow, saying, "This sort of exploration is best left to professionals. Nevertheless, I am willing to let you go, since it is your fault the princess was kidnapped."

Sea Caves

1. Shingle Beach. Beyond the reef, a clear lagoon with a narrow, black-pebbled beach lies hemmed in by high cliffs. In better times, Sultan Firouz moored his boats here. The cave complex that extends into the cliff was excavated for easy access to the beach. Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs approach the beach:

A thin strip of black shingle beach slopes from the looming cliffs to the clear water of the lagoon. You can see the gaping mouths of five dark caves in the cliff face. Half a dozen rotten wooden posts stand in two lines from one of the cave entrances to the sea, and a few rusted metal rings have been driven into the cliff wall.

The beach runs along the shoreline for 67 yards, and is 17 yards wide from the sea to the cliff. As the PCs pull up their skiff, eight giant crabs scuttle out of the caves to attack.



Giant crabs (8): AC 2; HD 3 (L); hp 20, 17 (×2), 16, 15, 12, 10, 9; MV 60' (20'); #AT 2 pincers; Dmg 2d6/2d6; Save F2; ML 7; INT 2; AL N; XP 35; RC/164.

After the crabs are dispensed with, the PCs can examine the cliff or the caves. Thieves or mystics can determine that the 400'-high cliff face is sheer; only those with the ability to climb walls would have a chance of ascending safely. (PCs with mountaineering skill and the proper equipment may also scale the cliffs.) Anyone who climbs to the top of the cliff sees a fissure about 85 yards from the cliff face. A rough-hewn staircase rises up from the sea caves through this natural fissure. Also visible from the cliff top is a twin-towered structure located several miles to the north.

2. Five Cave Mouths. The cave entrances are slippery and lead downward into a dank, water-filled cavern (area 3). The passage that the posts lead to has been artificially straightened.

> The dank, seaweed-clogged tunnel slopes down for some distance. Salt water trickles down the walls and gathers in pools on the slippery, uneven floor. At first you are ankle deep, but it seems you will soon be up to your waist in dank, foul-smelling brine.

3. Ghoul Cave. After 60' the tunnels converge in one large chamber where three ghouls lurk. The ghouls are the remains of pirates who died in a storm, which washed their dying bodies and the treasure chest they clung to into the cave. They were turned into ghouls by their greed and now feed on any carrion that is swept into the caves or left by the crabs, which they tolerate as food providers. As the PCs enter the ghouls' abode with a light source, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The tunnel opens abruptly into a vast, echoing, partially submerged cavern. Despite the presence of a light source, the roof is lost in gloom and you cannot see below the surface of the waist-deep murky water. At the far end of the cave, you can just make out stone steps rising from the water into darkness.
>
> Suddenly, three hideous humanoid figures lunge out of the water. The dim light barely reveals their rotten and disfigured flesh. Tatters of clothing hang on their twisted bodies. Their leering mouths reveal horribly sharp teeth as their taloned fingers claw the air.

Fighting waist-deep in water on slippery stone penalizes each PC's attack rolls by −1. The ghouls' greed is so strong that they will break free of any clerical turning as soon as someone approaches within 5' of the treasure chest. The chest lies underwater on the bottom step leading to area 4.

Ghouls (3): AC 6; HD 2* (M); hp 14, 12, 11; MV 90' (30'); #AT 2 claws/1 bite; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d3 plus paralysis; Save F2; ML 9; INT 3; AL C; XP 25; RC/178.

The iron-bound sea chest is made of hardwood; its lock has rusted solid. Because it is full of brine and treasure, the chest is very heavy, weighing 500 lbs. out of the water. It contains 512 gp from various countries; 40 assorted semiprecious stones (30 gp each); a gold *ring of truth*; two clear, odorless, sweet-

tasting potions of *super-healing*; a *dagger +1*; and a waterproof case containing a magical scroll with the spells *detect magic, locate object,* and *protection from evil 10' radius.*

4. Eyes in the Dark. If the PCs climb the stairs toward area 5, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The carved steps lead upward out of the water. Fifty feet ahead, you see a rust-encrusted metal gate through which you glimpse a pair of red glowing eyes.

The gate is locked and cannot be picked due to centuries of corrosion. The lock can be forced open with a combined total of 30 Strength points. The glowing eyes are actually a trick set in area 5.

5. Disused Guardroom. This large room was once used by Sultan Firouz's guards. It contains a stone bench and a few rusted hooks on the walls. None of this is immediately visible, because the room is pitch dark. The glowing eyes disappear the instant any light is brought to the metal gate. The eyes are just magical paint and were put on the wall to deter unwelcome visitors. The eyes have no effect apart from the glow.

If the PCs want to rest in this room, they will not be disturbed. The only exit from the room is a stone door set into the west wall. Beyond the stone door, a set of rough-hewn stairs zigzag up through a natural fissure to the top of the cliff (area 6).

6. Cliff Top. When the PCs reach the cliff top, either through the fissure from area 5 or up the cliff from the beach, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> Looking back toward the water, you can see your dhow moored safely in the lagoon. You can just barely see Mustafa supervising Ali, who is moving the vizier's largest trunk into the princess's cabin. Inland, as far as the eye can see, lies the parched desert. The only feature breaking the monotony of the wasteland is a twin-towered building several miles farther north.

The Qal'at of Firouz al-Algarin

There is nothing but barren desert for many days' walk in any other direction except toward the distant towers. This must be the destination to which the princess was carried. As the party approaches Firouz's qal'at, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The building is surrounded by a high white wall over which you spot a green, domed roof flanked by two dull white towers. As you draw nearer, you can see that the whole structure is rather dilapidated. Shards have fallen from the marble walls, and the green roof seems to be badly tarnished copper. You notice that you are walking over the vestiges of a small village worn down to its foundations by the ravages of time. As you cross the parched ground, winged creatures rise up from the tops of the towers and flap toward you.

These are two **gargoyles** (hp 20, 17) plus any that survived the attack on the ship. They take two rounds to enter melee range, and approach from different sides to avoid area-effect spells. The gargoyles attack until destroyed.

The Story Unfolds

The PCs arrive at the palace hoping to rescue Princess Yasmin, only to find her trapped in the company of the beholder sultan, Firouz al-Algarin. Although the party could confront the beholder and attempt to wrest the princess from his clutches, there is a way to save Yasmin without harming the cursed Firouz.

A benevolent ghost will offer to help the PCs rescue the princess. (See area 5 of the qal'at.) The ghost, a former servant of Firouz, believes it knows the secret to restoring the sultan's humanity. Contained within the palace's eastern tower are notes detailing the process for preparing a potion that will restore the sultan's sanity. The ghost wrongly believes that the potion will also transform Firouz back into a human being, when in truth the potion will restore only his human mind.

Once the PCs have found the necessary ingredients (see area 12 of the qal'at) and concocted the potion, they must find some way to administer it to Firouz (preferably without his knowledge). Years of existence as an eye tyrant have made Firouz a dangerous and unbalanced creature. The beholder dislikes the presence of outsiders—except, of course, the women he brings through his *mirror of desire.*

The company of Yasmin has distracted Firouz and made him unusually pleasant. He does not anticipate any retaliation for the princess's abduction and has made no effort to post guards, other than his gargoyles. The PCs should be able to enter and explore Firouz's palace without the beholder being aware of their presence.

The PCs must act quickly, however, for the cursed sultan has already made plans to wed Princess Yasmin. If the PCs restore Firouz's sanity, the sultan will call off the wedding and seek to make amends. He also asks that the PCs help restore the life of his beloved Aurelia. Yasmin, feeling pity for the beholder, will ask that the PCs help to undo Firouz's curse by tracking down the villain responsible. (See "The Fortress of Nazir al-Azrad" for details.)

Qal'at Grounds

1. Entrance. An open archway leads into the courtyard surrounding the twin-towered palace. Above the archway, a chiseled message reads:

> "Let it be known that this qal'at and the court of Sultan Firouz al-Algarin are cursed by the wizard Nazir al-Azrad, whose anger is mighty and whose vengeance is eternal."

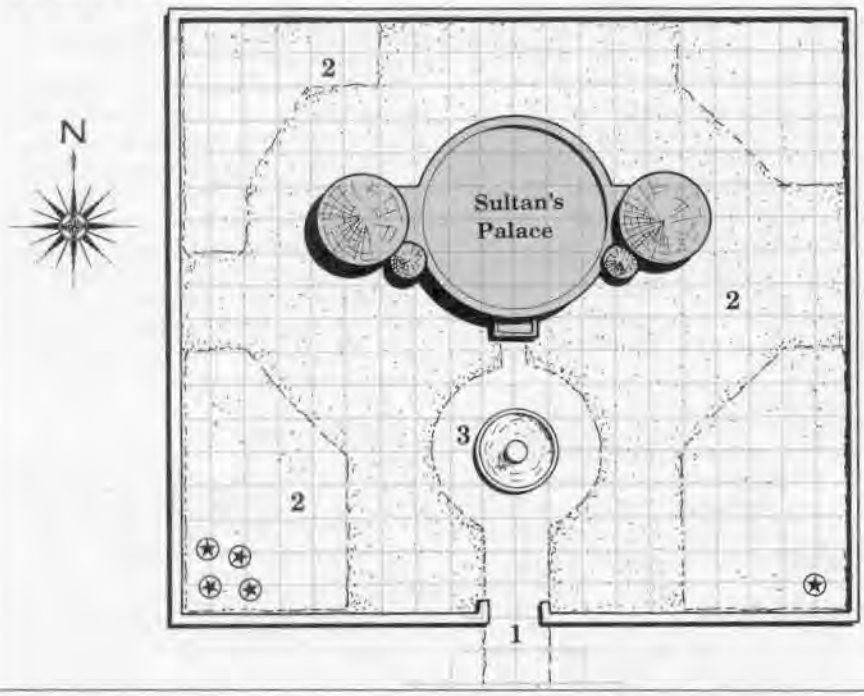
PCs who make a successful Intelligence check at −10 may have heard something about Nazir. However, all they know is that he was a mage of awesome power and evil reputation who was rumored to live in the remote interior of Algarin about five centuries ago. In contrast, the legacy of the sultan's rule is common knowledge to those who live in this part of the world. Firouz and his ancestors ruled Algarin for hundreds of years. Centuries ago, Algarin was a vast, seemingly endless stretch of land that incorporated the territories now referred to as Sasan and Samarkand. Its vastness has diminished with the passage of time.

2. Courtyard.

> You find yourselves in a courtyard of baked earth that, unlike the land outside, is streaked with sand. Ahead, double doors of tarnished copper stand ajar. Between the archway and the doors is a dried-up fountain. A stone sculpture of thrashing, open-mouthed water elementals forms its centerpiece. Barren gardens

Qal'at Grounds

1 square = 20′



fill the open areas inside the walls. Inside the wall, at the southwest corner, stands a group of worn stone statues: three men in fighting stance and one who has fallen to his knees in prayer. To the right, near the base of the wall, lies the broken statue of a man with his left arm outstretched.

The statues are the petrified remains of adventurers who came here many years ago and encountered the beholder. The stone has been eroded by the elements, and the victims cannot be restored by any means short of a *wish*.

The three fighters wore studded leather armor, tunics, baggy pants, and turbans. They bore shields and brandished scimitars. (One of the weapons has snapped off at the hilt.) The kneeling figure was a cleric, petrified in the act of calling for divine intervention that never came. By his side, half-buried in the sand, is a wooden *staff of striking* (21 charges). The cleric dropped the staff before he was petrified. Because of its magical nature, the staff has not decayed over the years. The broken man in the southeast corner was a thief who was trying to climb over the wall when the beholder caught him.

3. Cursed Fountain. This fountain was once the site of a spring that irrigated the palace and the surrounding lands. However, Nazir wedged a magical black gem (marked with the sigil of a glowing white flame) into the neck of the fountain to curse the spring. The fountain is now a magical trap. If anyone comes within 30′ of it, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you cross the courtyard, sand explodes from the mouths of the strange creatures that make up its centerpiece. The sand billows into the air and covers the courtyard instantly. Before the grit has settled, three humanoid-shaped mounds of sand with crude features rise up to attack.

These are desert ghosts. Despite their name, these elemental creatures are not undead and cannot be turned by a cleric.

Although they inflict 5d8 hp electrical damage per successful attack, desert ghosts also lose 1d4 hp every time they successfully strike a target (1-2 hp if the victim makes the saving throw). On a roll of 19 or 20, the desert ghost blinds its victim (−4 to hit; +4 AC penalty; save vs. dragon breath indicates the PC avoided the blinding dust). The victim remains blinded until the sand is washed out.

Desert ghosts are immune to *sleep, charm,* and *hold* spells. They are harmed by only metal weapons, although PCs attacking with metal melee weapons suffer 1-3 hp electrical damage per successful attack. Metal-tipped missile weapons inflict only half damage on the desert ghosts, but cause no electrical damage to the user. The creatures are impervious to normal fire, suffer minimum damage from magical fire (1 hp/die), but suffer 1d8 hp damage per flask of water. Electrical attacks actually increase their hit points by the amount of damage that the attack would have inflicted, but regardless of the electrical "intensity," they cannot exceed their maximum allotted hit points.

Desert ghosts (3): AC 3; HD 5** (L); hp 28, 25, 23; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1 touch; Dmg 5d8 (1d8 per HD; half if save vs. spells is successful); Save F5; ML 10; INT 5; AL N; XP 425; CC/28.

If the party can remove the gem that curses the spring, the desert ghosts dissipate. The gem (worth 500 gp) can easily be seen down any of the sculpture's mouths. It can be dislodged with a successful remove-traps roll, a *remove curse,* or a *knock* spell. The gem has no magical properties if removed from the fountain. Destroying the fountain by smashing it with magical weapons will also end the curse. Pure water bubbles up from the spring as soon as the curse is lifted.

Qal'at Interior

4. Entrance.

The tarnished copper doors open onto an unlit passage, at the end of which you can see a white glow diffused by a filigree screen of geometric patterns woven in fine silver wire. The delicate screen appears to be untouched by the decay that pervades the exterior of the structure.

As you approach, you see that the screen curves to the left and right, with a dim corridor running along the perimeter. Arched doors are set into the screen just opposite the entrance passage. By peering through the fine lacelike wire pattern, you can see that the screen encloses a richly appointed circular room.

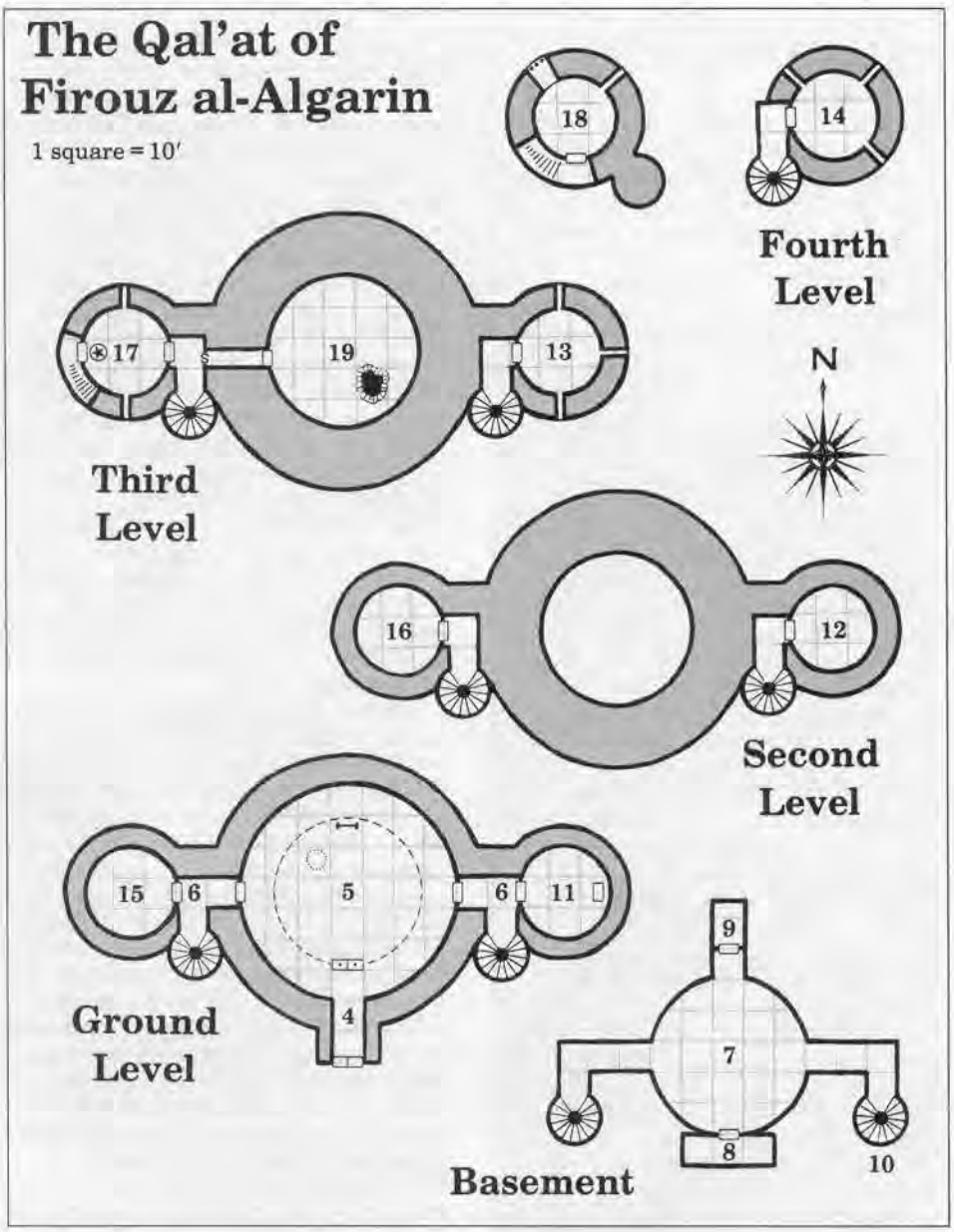
Except for the double doors, the beholder's throne room (area 5) is completely enclosed by the filigree screen. This ornamental mesh of intertwined silver wire blocks vision except when peered through from close up; the screen cannot be parted or lifted without excessive force, and not without damaging it. The corridor that encircles the central chamber allows access to the twin towers. The bronze doors leading to the towers are unlocked.

If the party makes noise in the circular hallway, the occupant of the center room will dismiss the disturbance as being caused by the gremlins in the kitchen. (See area 7 of the qal'at.) If the noise is excessive, the annoyed sultan may investigate (50% chance).

5. Throne Room. Behind the door and screen lies the sultan's throne room. The door in the screen has a fancy silver lock that is currently secured. As soon as the PCs get close enough to see through the filigree, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> Your eyes are immediately drawn to the huge spherical monster currently resting on an enormous pillow near the center of the room. A beautiful woman whom you've never seen before gently pats its brow with a damp cloth and feeds it figs from a large seashell. The monster's central eye is closed tightly. It appears to be rapt in pleasure as rivulets of water trickle down its bulbous hide. Its other 10 eyes, each affixed to a rubbery stalk, stare toward a gilded cage in which Princess Yasmin languishes.
>
> The floor of the room is covered with silk cushions and pillows. Near the eastern wall, a huge golden goblet sits atop a small circular table. A large glowing crystal suspended on a chain from the ceiling illuminates the room; two keys—one gold, one silver—hang from this crystal. A 5'-diameter circular hole is visible in the ceiling, 30' above. A large gilt-framed mirror is fixed to the far wall.

The monster is Sultan Firouz al-Algarin, the beholder. His *mirror of desire* hangs on the north wall behind him. (Only the sultan can use this magical item; see the sidebar for details.) The seashell is a *horn of plenty* from which Firouz and his wives feed. It is capable of producing food and drink for 20 people a day. The glowing crystal (100 gp value) has a *continual light* spell cast on it. The golden key hanging from the crystal opens Yasmin's gilded cage. The silver key opens the filigree door to the room. The goblet resting on the sultan's table is worth 2,500 gp.



Before the PCs declare their actions for the round, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The monster speaks to Princess Yasmin while glancing mournfully toward the woman standing dutifully by his side. "Princess Yasmin, look upon my devoted wife, who has been faithful to me these past five years. Now, unhappily, she has betrayed me."
>
> The woman serving him frowns in bewilderment and asks, "How have I offended you, my beloved?"
>
> Without hesitation, the stalk over his central eye gazes toward her. "You are no longer the fairest in the land." With that, a violet beam shoots forth from the small eye and she is turned to stone. The beast

sighs deeply and rotates to face Yasmin, opening his large central eye and saying, "Tomorrow at sunrise you shall be my new bride." A moment later, another eye nonchalantly emits a blue beam that levitates the statue of the beholder's former beloved through the hole in the ceiling.

If the PCs seem prepared to charge to Yasmin's rescue, insert the following encounter just before the party does something rash:

The *Mirror of Desire*

This 15'-tall, 10'-wide silver mirror set in a gilt frame radiates strong alteration and divination magic. Only the mirror's rightful owner can activate its magical properties; anyone else looking into the mirror sees a normal reflection. Ownership cannot be stolen, it must granted. If the previous owner dies without bequeathing the mirror to another, it loses all enchantment.

The mirror was originally created by a djinni pasha as a wedding gift for one of Sultan Firouz's ancestors, and it has been passed down through the family ever since. Even when he is restored to his true form, Firouz will not give away the *mirror of desire*. It is an heirloom he holds in trust for his children and his children's children.

Once per day the mirror allows its owner to view his heart's desire. This cannot be just a whim but the one particular thing he wants for himself more than anything else in the world. Depending on the individual, this could be anything from fabulous riches to true love. By stepping into the mirror, the owner and up to 10 others, if he so wishes, will be transported as a ball of light at incredible speed (MV 540') to the object of desire. The mirror will also transport them back, but only if they successfully obtain their goal. Thus, there is some risk involved as the travelers will not necessarily know where they are, what guards the object, or how to attain it. Merely being in the presence of your heart's desire does not guarantee getting it, as Firouz well knows.

Suddenly, an apparition of a thin, stoop-shouldered man steps out of the wall in front of you, barring your path into the beholder's chamber. The ghost beckons soundlessly with ink-stained fingers and backs along the east corridor, motioning for you to follow.

This is the ghost of the sultan's scribe, Khalid bin Varzakh. Khalid is mute and can beckon and signal with his hands only. Being Lawful, the ghost does not attack but tries to lure the party to the library (area 12 of the qal'at) to show them how they can save his master. If the PCs try to attack the beholder, Khalid's ghost appears right in front of them and shouts a soundless "NO!" while waving its arms. If the PCs persist in their combative actions or refuse to follow him, Khalid attempts to possess a PC and force the party to the library. The ghost will not attempt to age anyone but might paralyze PCs who behave aggressively.

When he thinks the party will follow, Khalid enters the east tower, disappearing through the doorway down the corridor. He ascends the stairs to the library and leads the PCs to the book on the desk, which he points at until they decipher its contents.

Khalid bin Varzakh, ghost: AC −2; HD 14**** (M); hp 70; MV 90' (30'); #AT 1 touch/1 gaze; Dmg age 1d4 × 10 years/paralysis (paralysis lasts 2-8 rounds); Save M14; ML 10; INT 14; AL L; XP 5,500; RC/182 (Haunt, ghost). The ghost is immune to attack from +1 or lesser weapons and is immune to all spells.

If the PCs ignore the ghost and attack the beholder, Firouz retaliates with what, in beholder terms, is some restraint. Firouz initially tries to *slow* them all, *telekinesing* any PCs who are not affected. He flies out of melee range and uses his *flesh to stone* ray on the first person to hurt him seriously. Firouz is feeling generous because he is to be married and wishes to have guests. If all else fails, he attempts to *charm* the PCs to prevent them from attacking him again.

Firouz has already *charmed* Princess Yasmin. If the PCs try to rescue her, she rushes to the beholder and wraps her arms around the sultan, claiming that she loves him. The beholder's *charm* and other eye effects are cast at 20th level.

Sultan Firouz al-Algarin (beholder): AC 0 (body), 2 (central eye), 7 (eye stalks); HD 11***** (M); hp 50 (body), 20 (central eye), 12 (eye stalk); MV 30' (10'); #AT 1 bite plus special; Dmg 2d8 plus special; Save M11; ML 12; INT 16; AL C; XP 5,100; RC/160.

6. Connecting Corridors. These two short corridors are set off with doors at either end. A door in the east wall of each corridor leads to spiral stairs going down and up. Khalid's ghost leads the party up to the library on the second floor of the east tower (area 12 of the qal'at). As the PCs approach the stairs, they hear voices from below.

Basement

7. Kitchen. A pack of 10 gremlins took up residence in the basement many years ago, and the beholder tolerates them as servants. Their leader is a shaman (a clerical spellcaster) but is not expecting combat and has not memorized any offensive spells. The gremlins usually live off scraps from the *horn of plenty* (see area 5 of the qal'at) but sometimes forage outside. At the moment, they are trying to make a wedding cake. The shaman, who is the only gremlin who can read even slightly, is reciting the recipe from a large book.

As you near the bottom of the steps, you can hear a scratchy voice speaking very slowly in faltering Common. "Add dah mel-ted ingrudants. . . dah dates . . . eggs . . . jin-jur . . . an' beat well." This is followed by a series of dull thuds and ill-tempered snarls, then, "No! Cake! Cake!"

You peer around the bottom of the stairs and see a scene of utter chaos. Ten small green-skinned humanoids are milling around a large kitchen. One of them is standing on a stool in the middle of the room, reading from a large open book and waving a ladle around like a wand. Several more of the creatures are stirring a large pot on a table while others are whacking each other with wooden spoons. A fat one sits in a corner, stuffing his face with figs from a bowl, a bottle of red wine by his side. All of the creatures are plastered in sticky brown goo.

"Not dee wine!" screeches the one on the stool as he hurls his ladle, hitting the fat one between the eyes and making him spit out a shower of figs. "Dat's fur dah Eye-ball's weddin'!"

The gremlins will not attack a well-armed party, preferring to back away from a fight unless they outnumber the PCs by three to one. They are rather irritable and insolent, and are not above hurling cake batter at PCs who provoke them. If chased from the kitchen, they cover their escape by throwing lumps of batter and cooking utensils.

The gremlins can easily be bribed with food or treasure, or fooled into thinking the PCs are guests of the beholder. Speaking in stilted Common, the shaman can provide accurate information about what lies in the west tower and the main building. The gremlins have never been in the sultan's bedroom (area 18 of the qal'at) because of "dah metal man" (iron living statue). Nor have they entered the east tower, because they are scared of "dah see-thru man" (Khalid's ghost).

The only exits from the kitchen are the east and west stairwells, a door in the south wall that leads to the servants' quarters (area 8 of the qal'at), and a door in the north wall that leads to the larder (area 9).

Abu, gremlin shaman: AC 7; HD 1**** (S); Shaman4; hp 11; MV 120' (40'); #AT special; Dmg special or by spell type; SA *chaotic aura*; Save E1; ML 12; INT 9; AL C; XP 275; RC/181. Spells: *cure light wounds, light, hold person.*

Gremlins (9): HD 1** (S); hp 4 each; #AT special; Dmg special; Save E1; XP 16; other statistics as for Abu. None of these gremlins can cast spells.

8. Servants' Quarters. The gremlins sleep here on old sacking and broken cots that are poorly mended with bits of old rope. The narrow rectangular room is very untidy, but the gremlins clean it out regularly—on the "Eye-ball's" orders—so it does not smell too bad. There is nothing of value here.

9. Larder. This small pantry is lined with shelves, most of which are bare. The lowest shelf holds a few sacks of stale flour, dried fruit, salt, and coffee.

10. Refuse Pit. Continuing down the east stairwell from the kitchen, the PCs find the stairwell blocked by an unlocked wooden door barred from this side. Beyond the door, the stairs continue spiralling downward for 20', ending at a 4'-diameter, 10'-deep circular pit. The pit contains a green slime, the qal'at's waste disposal system. At one time the slime was kept in check by regular burning, but the gremlins have been less than diligent in this task and the pit is now full of slime. The stairs below the door are slippery with kitchen refuse thrown down by the gremlins, who are not keen on getting near the slime.

Anyone not taking precautions (such as moving slowly or securing a rope) must make a Dexterity check to avoid slipping down the stairs into the green slime. A rope handrail once made the stairs safer and easier, but the gremlins removed it long ago to mend their cots.

Green slime: AC can always be hit; HD 2** (L); hp 14; MV 3' (1'); #AT 1; Dmg special; Save F1; ML 7; INT 0; AL N; XP 30; RC/181. Green slime cannot be harmed by any attacks except fire or cold.

East Tower

The party will be safe here as none of the qal'at's current inhabitants ever enter. The gremlins are afraid of the ghost, and the beholder is too big and needs nothing from here anyway.

11. Chapel.

> Within this disused chapel are several vases of dried-up flowers. The walls are decorated with faded holy writing, and on the far side of the room two gold rings rest on a cushion atop an altar. Dust and cobwebs are everywhere.

The holy writing radiates a faint magical aura. This is the blessing required to make the magical potion that will restore the beholder's sanity. (See "The Story Unfolds," "Preparing the Potion," and area 12 of the qal'at for details.) The chapel still holds the two gold wedding rings (500 gp each) intended for the sultan and Aurelia. PC clerics may suspect that the room was set up for a wedding service, although no one has entered here for a very long time.

12. Library.

> As you enter this room lined with bookshelves, your attention focuses on a seated human skeleton collapsed over a book on a large desk in the middle of the library. Next to the skull, the skeleton's bony hand rests on an overturned glass ink bottle. A wide patch of indigo has spread from

In sorrow I must relate herein the tale of my master, Sultan Firouz al-Algarin. This tale began the night my master peered through his magical mirror and beheld a woman of such exquisite beauty that his heart longed to be with her. Through the surface of the mirror he was transported to her presence, traveling across the vast, moonlit desert like a shooting star.

The fair lady Aurelia returned with Firouz that very night. Her arrival brought much happiness and reverie to the sultan's qal'at. Few were surprised at the haste with which their marriage was arranged. However, the next day during their wedding, all reverie was shattered with the sudden arrival of Aurelia's father, Nazir al-Azrad, who cursed Aurelia for betraying him and damned Firouz for stealing his daughter. In his rage, Nazir used his magical staff to transform the sultan into an eleven-eyed monster and slew the holy cleric about to marry the couple. Finally he turned upon his daughter and changed her into a statue of purest unliving crystal. With blinding fury he vanished, taking his daughter from the sultan's sight forever.

My master was driven mad by the shock of his own transformation and beholding that of his beloved. His memories were jarred from him, and he used the fearsome powers of his eyes to destroy all who stood before him. The court became an empty reflection of its former self, leaving Firouz as lord of nothing.

When the destruction ended, he turned his eyes to the magnificent mirror, and a beautiful woman from a nomadic tribe was shown to him. A prisoner of his own feelings of loss and regret, he used his mirror to capture her and charmed her with his power. He kept her as his wife until her looks were surpassed by another, at which time he immortalized the nomad woman's remaining beauty in stone.

Thus I fear the centuries will pass as the sultan tires of his concubines, petrifies them, and takes new ones. But as his hall fills with statues, his heart will grow lonelier. Now, of all his true friends, only I, his scribe, remain. I hide in my library where the sultan never ventures and have spent my time searching for some remedy for his cursed enchantment. I believe a cure is possible, though I myself am unable to effect it, since the components are beyond my reach and the ceremony beyond my abilities.

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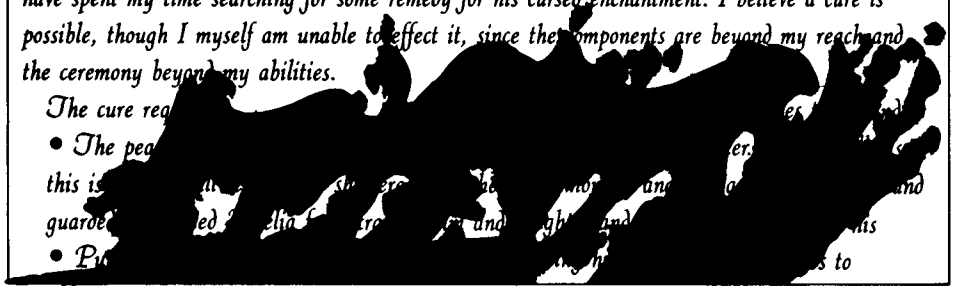


the vial over the right-hand page of the tome. The ghostly man who confronted you earlier stands over the desk and points to the book.

The ghost is Khalid, and the book contains the scribe's account of the events involving Sultan Firouz's transformation. The scribe managed to remain at the court covertly, as the beholder rarely left his throne room. Through his researches in the library, Khalid managed to discover the recipe for a magical potion that might undo the sultan's curse. However, he did not realize that the potion would restore only the sultan's mind and not his form. From Khalid's notes, the PCs may make the same mistake.

The potion is made by placing the pearl from Firouz's chain of office (located in the sultan's bedroom, area 18 of the qal'at) in a golden goblet like the one found in the scribe's bedroom (area 14). The goblet must be filled with water taken directly from its source (like the water from the cursed courtyard fountain in area 3 of the qal'at). Once the goblet has been filled and the pearl added, a cleric must recite the holy blessing written on the chapel walls (area 11 of the qal'at) to complete the ceremony.

Because Khalid was not a cleric, he could not complete the ceremony himself, which is why he recorded the correct procedure in his ledger. Unfortunately, he died of old age just as he completed his task, spilling an ink bottle over the last page as he collapsed on his desk. In his anguish at this final blunder, he refused to pass on and has haunted the qal'at ever since.

The DM should photocopy the page of Khalid's book reproduced here, and hand it to the players when the PCs examine the tome.

The drawer in the desk is locked. If the PCs manage to open it, they find some blank, yellowed vellum; a small box of sand; another box containing a fine white powder (chalk); a stylus; a magnifying glass with an ivory handle (worth 100 gp); and a silver skull cap. The skull cap is a magical *helm of reading* (*RC*, page 240).

If the PCs spread chalk over the ink-stained page, then blow the excess away, some of the chalk will remain in the stylus indentations, allowing the PCs to read the ruined script. The obscured text reads as follows:

The cure requires the following ingredients:

- The pearl from the sultan's chain of office. I believe this is still in his bedchamber, where it is guarded by the iron statue.
- Pure water. The evil wizard Nazir al-Azrad has cursed the fountain in the courtyard so it now produces only sand. I do not know how to repair the fountain and have to collect dew in a copper dish for myself.
- A golden goblet in which the water and pearl must be placed.

The blessing on the walls of the chapel must be read over the goblet and ingredients by a holy cleric. If this is done correctly, the pearl should dissolve completely into the water.

The potion must be administered to the sultan. Although I do not know how he can be persuaded to drink it, the elixir may be removed from the goblet and placed in some less obvious container without affecting its potency.

Once the PCs have read the complete text, Khalid's ghost fades away.

There are no magical tomes anywhere on the shelves. The books are all accounts of court proceedings, inventories, and tax returns. However, one of the early entries in a red volume labeled *Royal Acquisitions* states that the fountain in the courtyard was erected above an underground spring of pure water. A later entry contains a description of the iron living statue constructed to guard the sultan's quarters (see area 17 of the qal'at), as well as the procedure for building others of its kind. Such information may be worth something to a wizard or sage in Sasan or Samarkand.

PCs searching Khalid's skeleton will find a key that opens both of the chests in area 14 of the qal'at.

13. Guest Bedroom.

> You enter what was obviously a bedroom. It contains a canopied bed, an ornate dresser, and a large wardrobe. The once-fine silk draperies are faded and decayed. Dust covers the floor.

Aurelia stayed here for a few hours before her ill-fated wedding to Firouz. The wardrobe contains a dusty but unfaded purple silk dress studded with amethysts and moonstones (worth 8,000 gp), which Aurelia had been wearing the night she eloped with Firouz.

14. Bedroom.

> A room crowded with furniture lies at the top of the spiral stairs. There doesn't seem to be enough room for the two low beds, two padlocked chests, a worn desk, two chairs, and shelves cluttered with dusty bottles, a chess set, vases, and a tarnished silver oil lamp. Everything is dusty and faded.

This is the chamber shared centuries ago by Khalid the scribe and Abdallah, the sultan's cleric (who was killed by Nazir during Firouz and Aurelia's wedding ceremony). Two of the bottles still contain oil for the lamp, but the rest are empty. The key to both chests can be found in area 12 of the qal'at.

The scribe's chest holds a robe, paper, quills, and a small brass key that opens the desk drawer in area 12. The cleric's chest contains vestments, candles, flint and steel, a golden goblet (worth 1,000 gp; one of the items needed to prepare the beholder's sanity potion), and a bottle with a 2"-long metal crescent tied to its stopper with string. (See area 17 of the qal'at for details.) The bottle contains a potion of *super-healing*.

West Tower

15. Reception Room.

> This room looks as though it has been looted. The dozen tattered and broken chairs that are left are faded and covered in cobwebs and dust.

There is nothing of value in this room. The gremlins have taken (and probably broken) everything else.

16. Bedroom. This room also shows signs of looting. There is a bare bedstead and an unlocked, empty chest. Everything is strewn with cobwebs and dust.

17. Firouz's Living Quarters. The spiral stairs do not reach the top of the west tower but stop at the third floor. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> The spiral stairs end here, opening onto the small foyer of a once lavishly appointed living room. Another doorway can be seen at the far side of the room, but in front of it stands an 8'-tall iron statue, its arms crossed menacingly.
>
> The thick dust that covers everything suggests that the room has not been used for years. A dining table is flanked by two ornate wooden chairs with faded cushions. A fine carpet covers the floor beneath the table and a divan whose original color can no longer be determined.

The statue is an iron living statue. If the PCs approach the statue, it puts out a hand to stop them. PCs standing within 10' of the statue can notice a 2"-long crescent-shaped indentation in its forehead, the only mark on its otherwise perfectly smooth body. A PC who obtained the metal crescent from area 14 of the qal'at can approach the statue and place the crescent into the statue's forehead. This causes the statue to step aside and allow that person (and no one else) to pass through the doorway safely.

The statue attacks only if someone comes within 5' (except any PC in possession of the metal crescent). Determined adventurers can reach the next level by scaling the outside of the tower, although they must circumvent the bars on the bedroom window to enter area 18 of the qal'at. The statue's only task is to guard the doorway.

The doorway opens onto a narrow flight of stairs that curls up to a locked door.

Iron living statue: AC 2; HD 4* (L); hp 28; MV 30' (10'); #AT 2; Dmg 1d8/1d8; Save F4; ML 11; INT 7; AL N; XP 125; RC/208.

18. Royal Bedroom. The lock on the door leading to the sultan's bedroom may be picked with normal chance of success. A *knock* spell will also permit entry. If the PCs manage to see inside the room, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> Although this room is also covered in dust, you can tell that it was once the master bedroom. A wardrobe of dark mahogany stands beside a large bed draped with a faded but fine-quality silk cover. A small table with a chair beside it stands beneath a barred window overlooking the parched gardens. Lying on the table are a jeweled short sword and a golden chain from which hangs a crescent amulet inset with a pearl.

The amulet is Sultan Firouz's chain of office. The pearl is needed to make the potion to restore the sultan's mind. The sword is a *short sword +2*. PCs searching the wardrobe find nothing but faded and fragile silk robes, baggy pants, and long strips of cloth (turbans).

Attic

19. Harem. The old harem occupies the top floor of the main building. The beholder now uses this area to store the statues of his former wives. A hole in the floor (*disintegrated* by the beholder) drops 30' to the throne room below. A locked secret door gives access to the harem from the sultan's living quarters on the third floor of the west tower (area 17 of the qal'at). If the PCs enter, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> You see a large, unlit, circular room with no windows. The floor and walls are decorated with striking geometric mosaics. There is no furniture, just rows of statues of beautiful women. In the southeast corner of the floor, a gaping hole opens to the throne room below.

If the PCs look through the hole, they see the beholder Firouz gazing lovingly at Princess Yasmin.

There are 15 statues in this chamber. *Stone to flesh* spells may be used to restore these women to life. If such magic is beyond the party's ability, the only way to restore the women is to undo Nazir's magic and reunite the sultan and his betrothed. (See "Concluding the Adventure" for details.)

Preparing the Potion

Firouz's transformation was accomplished using Nazir's staff and is treated as a 36th-level spell. The potion is specifically tailored to cure Firouz's curse and is far more potent than a generic *dispel magic* spell. The potion is guaranteed to restore the sultan's sanity if correctly prepared and administered.

Once the PCs have collected the proper ingredients, they must prepare the potion. First they must put fresh water into the golden goblet, then add the pearl from the sultan's chain of office. A cleric must then read the blessing from the chapel while holding the cup. As the cleric intones the blessing, the pearl will dissolve. The ritual takes one turn to complete.

Once the ritual is concluded, the party must find a way to get the beholder to drink the potion. He must swallow at least half the elixir for it to be effective. This can be achieved by diluting the bottle of wine in the kitchen with the potion. The gremlins can easily be distracted while this is done; they will not place a guard in the kitchen while they are asleep unless the party has been persistently aggressive toward them.

The Wedding

The beholder never sleeps. He spends the entire night gazing at Princess Yasmin. The gremlins wake up just before dawn and carry their sorry-looking cake upstairs, along with the bottle of wine. When the gremlins reach the throne room, they shuffle in and place the cake and wine down before the beholder. If the sultan was previously aware of the PCs, he expects them to attend as guests.

Abu, the gremlin shaman, is to conduct the wedding ceremony. He thinks it would be better to give the "Eyeball" a drink of wine first to keep him in a good mood and make him more likely to forgive Abu for mistakes.

The shaman commands one of the other gremlins to pour the wine. As the PCs watch, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> One of the beholder's servants shakily pours the bottle of wine into the huge golden goblet on the table. The beholder turns to Yasmin as a beam of bluish light shoots from one eye and strikes the gold key hanging from the light crystal. She gazes at him adoringly as he levitates the gold key from the crystal and unlocks her cage. Yasmin steps out and rushes to him, throwing her arms around him lovingly.
>
> "A toast to us," he proclaims, levitating the golden goblet to his monstrous lips and drinking deeply. The beholder blinks rapidly, wobbles up and down, and whirls uncontrollably before landing heavily on a large cushion.

When he comes to rest, the sultan's mind has been restored to sanity but his body remains unchanged. The effect of the potion lasts long enough to cushion his mind against the shock of realizing what he has become and done. He feels extreme remorse for his actions and is now quite embarrassed by the attentions of Princess Yasmin, who still clings to him adoringly.

Firouz thanks the party for restoring his mind but confesses that he cannot free Princess Yasmin from his *charm,* nor can he transform his petrified wives to flesh. He has forgotten how to use his eye-beams, and his ability to fly is erratic. Firouz could never bring himself to strike Yasmin (which would dispel the *charm*), but for the moment her affections are far from troublesome. Firouz is more concerned about the fate of his beloved Aurelia.

The party can try to free Yasmin from the effects of the beholder's 20th-level *charm* using a *dispel magic* spell. If they succeed, Princess Yasmin realizes what has happened but feels sad for the cursed sultan. An incurable romantic, she is eager to see Firouz restored to human form and reunited with his long-lost love. If the PCs are unable to free Yasmin and suggest that the beholder attack the princess to break the *charm,* Firouz opens his mouth widely, revealing massive teeth, and points out that a single bite could kill her.

Ending the Curse

Firouz asks the PCs to help him save Princess Aurelia from her evil father and to find some way to undo Nazir's curse. The beholder can elaborate on the information that the PCs gained from the scribe's notes and tell them a little more about Nazir al-Azrad. He knows nothing of Nazir's past except that Aurelia feared him, and that he lived in a rock fortress deep in the desert of Algarin. He insists that Aurelia is not evil like her father. Any hope of rescuing her hinges on the PCs' exploration of Nazir's lair. Firouz does not know whether or not Nazir is still alive, but he suspects that the evil sorcerer has found some way to prolong his life.

Firouz can transport himself and the PCs to Nazir's lair using his *mirror of desire,* although the PCs cannot use the mirror without him. He cautions the party that the mirror will return them only if he attains his heart's desire (the fair Aurelia). He is anxious to set out but does not mind waiting until the PCs are fully prepared before they embark. He will permit them to borrow whatever items they might find useful from his qal'at.

When the PCs are ready and Firouz looks through his mirror, they see only a vast rock surrounded by sand. Firouz tells them that the fortress lies within the rock and presumes that Nazir must have hidden the interior from scrying since the elopement.

The Fortress of Nazir al-Azrad

Centuries ago, the sorcerer Nazir al-Azrad was a philosopher seeking wisdom in the desert. There he found a colossal rock of unnatural stone. While sheltering in a deep cave in the rock, he discovered a mass of magical crystals formed around a single brilliant white flame. He studied the White Flame for many days until he determined that, although it radiated no heat, it was kept burning by the power of the crystals.

It was this strange relationship between the crystals and the White Flame that became the basis of his power. (For more information on this relationship, see area 17 of the fortress.) Nazir found that if he entered the Flame and bathed in its brilliant light, any cut or bruise he had taken was cured. Indeed, the White Flame seemed to cure even the ravages of time. After a while the Flame grew dim, and Nazir had to find

some way to replenish the crystals. He had learned that the crystals contained the essence of life itself. If he found a way to renew that essence, he would be immortal. Thus Nazir began his descent into evil and the mysteries of the Flame. In time, he came to view all life as less important than his own, and he began to think of innocents as mere receptacles of life essence to be fed to the Flame.

Later, he invited a few evil outlaws to become his personal guard and share the benefits of the Flame as a reward. He promised them a chance to get revenge against a society that had rejected them. They willingly murdered, abducted, and stole, secure in the knowledge that as long as they returned to bathe in the Flame, they would be immortal. To ensure the outlaws' loyalty, Nazir planted a magical peach tree that bore addictive fruit and made sure his guards ate their fill. (See area 3 of the fortress for details.)

Arrival at Nazir's Fortress

> You step through the mirror and emerge into searing desert heat. Directly in front of you is a vast and strangely smooth black rock about one mile across and half a mile high. In every other direction, sand dunes stretch to mountains on the distant horizon.

Embedded in the rock directly in front of the party is a narrow opening disguised as solid rock by a *hallucinatory terrain* spell. Firouz remembers that there used to be an entrance through a crevice in the rock, but he cannot see it now or remember exactly where it was.

If they walk directly up to the rock and examine it by touch, the PCs can find the passage easily. The rock is over three miles around, but the party will find no other entrance at ground level and no tracks but their own. If the PCs are really stuck, Firouz might accidentally focus his anti-magic ray on the area concealed by the *hallucinatory terrain* spell while practicing with his eyes.

The passage through the rock is far too narrow for the beholder to enter. Firouz chooses instead to levitate over the rock. He recalls that Nazir has an observatory at the top of his fortress and believes that he will be able to enter there. However, he is still too unsure of his powers to risk carrying anyone with him. If the PCs insist, Firouz will try to lift someone, but he is not strong enough to fly with a passenger. If the PCs ask the beholder to use his eye-beams, Firouz makes an earnest attempt, but the results are less than successful. He accidentally *slows* people and *disintegrates* nonliving objects (not people!). Now that Firouz has been restored to his human mind, he has truly forgotten how his beholder powers operate. The PCs must either scale the rock themselves (with a 50% penalty to their climb-walls and mountaineering checks due to the rock's smoothness) or venture into the tunnel.

1. Rock Entrance.

> The passage is narrow, dark, echoing, and cramped. Although it seems to be hewn from a natural fissure, the floor is suspiciously smooth and straight. Several feet into the crevice, the path is interrupted by a deep pit.

At the rock face, the crevice is 18" wide. Fourteen feet into the tunnel, the floor drops away abruptly to a 15'-deep pit. The pit replaces 25' of the tunnel floor in a wide arc, preventing the party from jumping across. The PCs can brace themselves between the walls, edging their way across the pit with a successful Dexterity check. The pit was dug here to prevent animals from wandering into the fortress, as evidenced by the carcass of a lizard lying at the bottom.

Nazir has not sealed off this tunnel in case he needs an emergency exit. Beyond the pit, the tunnel widens to 5'. It twists and turns, sloping gently upward for about half a mile to end at a locked doorway.

2. Guardian Room.

> Beyond the door is a 40' × 30' room with a copper door on the far side. The floor is a mosaic of red and yellow geometric patterns, and the bare rock walls are as smooth as marble.

The floor is a magical trap. When anyone not wearing one of Nazir's *rings of returning* (see the sidebar on page 45) steps into the room, he or she triggers a *create any monster* spell that conjures a chimera in the center of the room. The chimera attacks for the duration of the spell (three turns) or until it is killed. It will not leave the room and does not have enough room to fly.

The chimera cannot strike PCs protected by *anti-magic shells* or *protection from evil* spells, although PCs protected by the latter are still subject to its ranged attack (breath weapon). The chimera reappears each time the PCs reenter this room, but it does not regain lost hit points automatically. Once the chimera is slain, Nazir must recast his spell to prepare another guardian for this chamber.

The copper door on the far side of the room is unlocked and opens onto a set of steps that rises to area 3.

Chimera: AC 4; HD 9** (L); hp 50; MV 120' (40'); #AT 6 (2 claws/3 heads/breath); Dmg 1d3/1d3/2d4/1d10/3d4/3d6; Save F9; ML 9; INT 6; AL C; XP 2,300; RC/164. The chimera can breathe fire only three times per day (50% chance per round of combat).

3. The Poison Garden. The steps lead up 100' through a rough-hewn tunnel and out into a huge garden concealed from above by a *hallucinatory terrain* spell. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> You step out of the tunnel and into a huge, flourishing garden open to the sky but surrounded on all sides by rock. Exotic black flowers cling to the arched entrance and fill the air with spicy perfume. In the center of the garden, a beautiful woman reclines at the base of a tall peach tree laden with fruit. A path leads from the stairway entrance to the tree, and three other paths lead from the tree to doors in the rock face.
>
> The garden is alive with colors: red poppies, purple foxflowers, dark blue nightshade, and white hemlock. Exotic scents with the underlying tang of mold fill your nostrils. As you look around, you spot the slithering forms of small snakes amid the foliage. Two human gardeners stand on the paths and lethargically tend the plants using long hoes.

The woman is a lamara named Tamarind who is using her powers of illusion to make her snakelike lower body look like a pair of human legs. She has *charmed* the gardeners and serves Nazir because he has promised her immor-

tality. Any male PC looking at Tamarind must save vs. spells at −2 or be completely *charmed*. She commands *charmed* PCs to stay with her and rest while their compatriots continue to explore. The lamara will attack the party only in self-defense, if they damage her garden or snakes, or if they try to take away anyone she has *charmed*. If necessary, she directs her victims to fight for her.

Tamarind speaks in a low, melodious voice, asking the PCs why they have come. She graciously offers them peaches from the tree, assuring the PCs that the fruit is wholesome and thirst quenching. She allays their suspicions by taking a big bite out of one of the peaches, knowing that she is immune to the peaches' magical effect.

The peaches look inviting but are dangerous. They taste delicious, but just one bite requires a save vs. poison. Failure to save *slows* the victim for 1-3 hours, after which the victim must make a Wisdom check or desire more of the fruit. Tamarind takes advantage of this addiction, hoping the PCs will return so she may attempt to *charm* them again.

The exits from the garden lie at the cardinal points of the compass. If the PCs resist Tamarind's attempts to *charm* them, she will try to trick them by sending them through the north door (on Nazir's instructions), hoping that they will fall for the traps in area 14 of the fortress.

Tamarind (lamara): AC 4; HD 8* (L); hp 35; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1 tail/illusion; Dmg 3d8 (constriction damage each round); Save M8; ML 9; INT 14; AL C; XP 1,200; CC/67. Tamarind is immune to normal weapons and to *hold* and *charm* spells.

Adnan and **Rashid** (gardeners): AC 9; 0-level humans; hp 4 each; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1 hoe; Dmg 1d4; Save Normal Man; ML 6 (12 while *charmed*); INT 8; AL N.

The gardeners were both captured by Nazir's men and have been *charmed* by Tamarind to tend her garden. They know nothing important but will attack the party if Tamarind orders them to. The snakes of the garden also obey Tamarind's commands, but Nazir has enchanted the paths so that the cobras do not stray onto them.

Each snake can spit a stream of venom up to 6′ away; the victim must save vs. poison or be blinded. Blindness is permanent until a *cure blindness* spell is cast or the venom is thoroughly washed out (with a successful healing skill roll). Any PC who stumbles off the path may be bitten (Dmg 1d3); the victim must save vs. poison or die in 1-10 turns.

Spitting cobras (40): AC 7; HD 1* (S); hp 3 each; MV 90′ (30′); #AT 1 bite or 1 spit; Dmg 1d3 plus poison; Save F1; ML 7; INT 2; AL N; XP 13; RC/204 (Snake).

4. Training Hall. Four stone steps lead down to a large training hall. Positioned around the room are targets, dummies, and a quintain (a crosspiece on a post used for weapons training). Stacked on one side of the room is a pile of blunt wooden practice weapons. All of the equipment is in good repair but bears the marks of years of use.

Four doors lead out of this area, three in the north wall and one in the south.

5. Armory. The door to this room is locked. If the PCs enter, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> You see a small arsenal stacked with weapons of all descriptions, and various other pieces of equipment, most of which look like training gear.

The weapons in the armory are short swords, scimitars, jambiyas, and several black blowpipes each inscribed with a white flame. None of the equipment is magical, although all of it is of good quality. A pair of large padded metal clamps lies atop a wheeled cart. This equipment is used for moving the fragile crystals between areas 14 and 17 of the fortress.

6. Laboratory. The door from the hall is locked. If the PCs enter, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> A large stone slab occupies the center of this laboratory, the walls of which are lined with shelves containing ingots of copper, iron, and lead as well as various bottles, vials, tools, and instruments. Upon the slab lies the disassembled components of a large metal monster.

The materials on the shelves can be identified as equipment used for alchemy, metalworking, and stonecutting. One of the bottles contains a potion of *invisibility*. The rest hold various alchemical ingredients including corrosive acid (the exact effects of which are left up to the DM).

The partially disassembled construct on the slab is a mek that Nazir purchased from a contact who deals in exotic goods. The wizard has been slowly disassembling the creature while making notes on its construction. He hopes to someday be able to create more such monsters. In its current condition, the mek is merely a 7′ torso with arms. Its chest lies open, revealing numerous gears and wires connected to a piece of clear crystal about the size of a hen's egg.

Although it appears inert, the mek tries to clutch at anyone who gets within arm's reach. Its breath weapon has been deactivated, and it cannot move faster than it can drag itself by its arms. The mek can use only one arm to attack, as it needs the other to balance itself.

Incomplete mek: AC −4 (shell), 0 (exposed components); HD 6 (M); hp 30; MV 12′ (4′); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6×10; Save F13; ML 12; INT not ratable; AL L; XP 275; RC/192 (modified).

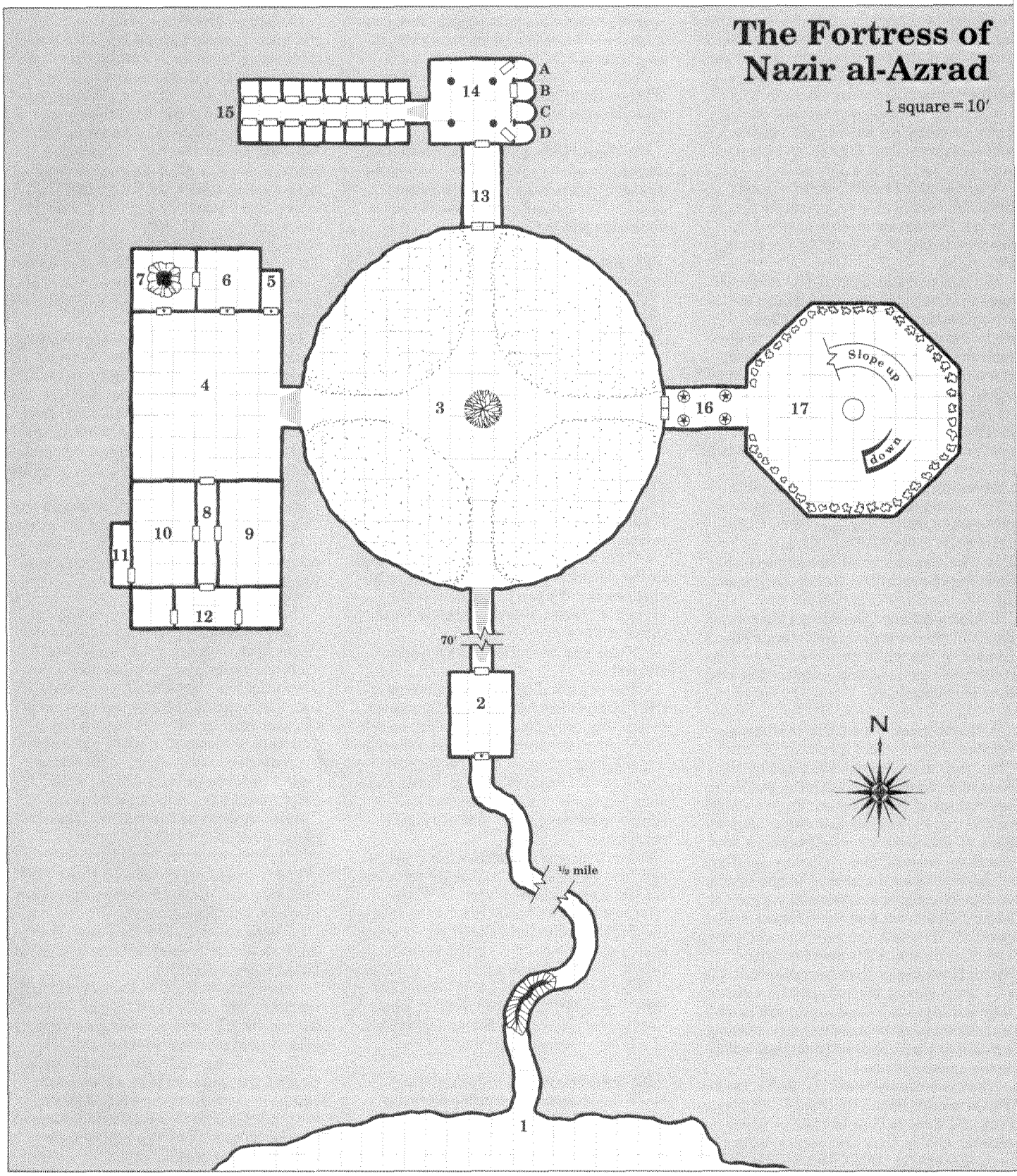
7. Forge. The door from the hall is locked, but the door leading from area 6 is unlocked. Both doors are warm to the touch. When the PCs open either door, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> Waves of heat assail you as you open the door to a forge. Your attention is drawn to a 10′-wide pit in the middle of the floor, a pit that radiates a red-hot glow. The pit is ringed with a brass chain spiked to the floor. Above the pit, a small crucible for metal ingots is suspended from a winch.

The room is hot but bearable. The temperature inside the pit, however, is scorching. Anyone climbing into the pit without protection from fire sustains 1d8 hp damage each round.

An efreeti named Myrage is magically bound into the 20′-deep hole. He has been forced by Nazir to serve as a forge and is extremely angry about it. He sees the party as a means of escape and will offer information in exchange for his freedom. Myrage knows the following:

- Nazir imprisoned him here many years ago and forces him to heat his forge. The sorcerer is currently using


The Fortress of Nazir al-Azrad
1 square = 10′
A
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Slope up
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1

the forge to construct replacement parts for a strange machine. Nazir's disassembled mek is in the laboratory next door.

- Nazir's power comes from a magical white flame charged by crystals.
- A band of ruthless men serves the sorcerer. They all wear black rings with white crystals that give them safe passage through Nazir's defenses.
- To free the efreeti, the PCs must break the brass chain that binds him to the pit. He cannot do this himself. A descent sword blow is sufficient to cut the chain.

Myrage will not fight Nazir directly, because the mage has threatened to trap him in a bottle and make him serve for eternity. If the PCs try to bargain further with the efreeti (demanding *wishes,* for example), he pretends to agree but breaks his word the instant he is free. Myrage tells the PCs they are lucky he does not incinerate them and promptly returns to the elemental plane of Fire.

Myrage, lesser efreeti: AC 3; HD 10* (L); hp 58; MV 90′ (30′), fly 240′ (80′); #AT 1 fist; Dmg 2d8; Save F15; ML 12; INT 14; AL C; XP 1,750; RC/174. The efreeti's spell-like powers are described fully in the *Rules Cyclopedia.*

8. Connecting Corridor. This corridor is lit by *continual light* stones embedded in the walls and has four unlocked doors leading from it. The hall is otherwise empty.

9. Dormitory. This room is lit by a *continual light* stone in a wall bracket. The large area contains several bunk beds and chests filled with the personal belongings of Nazir's men. Four men lie on the bunks, having just eaten from a bowl of peaches on a small table. A few pits from consumed fruit lie on the floor.

The men are all addicted to the peaches and, having just eaten some, are *slowed.* (See area 3 of the fortress for details.) They ask the PCs who they are and offer to share the peaches with them. However, if they perceive that the PCs are a threat to themselves or Nazir, they will attack. Nazir's men are armed with short swords and are each wearing a magical black ring inset with a white flame-shaped crystal.

Nazir's followers (4): AC 9; T7; hp 28 (Shakim), 26 (Elan), 25 (Pachi), 22 (Sahid); MV 120′ (40′) or 60′ (20′) while *slowed*; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; Save T7; ML 11; INT 9; AL C; XP 1,250; *ring of returning,* short sword, blowgun, 10 poisoned needles (save vs. poison or be paralyzed for 3d4 turns).

Thanks to frequent bathing in the White Flame, these men are immune to attacks with nonmagical weapons.

10. Mess Hall. The door opposite the dormitory opens into a large room with a long wooden table and 14 wooden chairs. The symbol of a white flame decorates the north wall.

11. Kitchen.

> A young but haggard woman is kneading bread. The room also contains a selection of dried and fresh food, some cutlery and plates. The woman looks up at you and screams, running into a corner to cower.

The woman is a nomad called Sahra. She was captured by Nazir's men last year and works out of fear. Her scream, though audible, does not attract the attention of Nazir's men across the hall. If the PCs calm her down, Sahra can relate the following information:

- Four of Nazir's followers are resting in the dormitory. Nazir himself is in his observatory. (Sahra can describe the layout of Nazir's private quarters and those of his men.)
- Nazir and his followers are indestructible.
- The crystal disk in the Chamber of the Flame is used for magical transportation, but only Nazir can make it work.
- Nazir himself insisted that she wear a black ring set with a white crystal flame at all times on pain of death. (She does not know what it does but will refuse to remove it for fear of Nazir's retribution.)

Sahra's ring is one of Nazir's *rings of returning* and allows her to get past the crystal living statues (area 16 of the fortress) to serve Nazir his meals. She is too frightened to help the party actively but can be coerced into making an escape from the complex.

Sahra al-Arazani: AC 9; 0-level human; hp 2; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; Save Normal Man; ML 4; AL N; unarmed.

12. Bathroom. An unlocked door leads to a rough-hewn stone chamber with a wooden stool and a basin of clear water. Two doors lead off to a tiled sauna and privy. Nothing here is valuable.

13. North Corridor. The doors from the garden open into an unlit 20′-wide corridor that leads to a stone door. Two invisible stalkers are bound to this corridor, stationed here to prevent prisoners from escaping. The stalkers have been instructed to attack anyone not wearing a *ring of returning* (see the sidebar on page 45) who tries to leave area 14 and return to the garden.

Invisible stalkers (2): AC 3; HD 8* (M); hp 30, 27; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1 blow; Dmg 4d4; Save F8; ML 12; INT 11; AL N; XP 1,200; RC/187. If the PCs cannot *detect invisible* things, the stalkers surprise them on a roll of 1-5 on 1d6.

14. Trap Chamber. The door leading back into area 13 is not visible from inside this room; it is chiseled to blend into the surrounding stone. Springs built into the stonework close the door automatically in one round unless the portal is held open. Locating and opening the door again requires a successful roll to detect secret doors.

Nazir has cast several illusions in this chamber to fool intruders and lure them into traps. When the PCs enter this area for the first time, read the following to the players:

> This 40′-square chamber is lit by many small, brightly glowing crystal shards suspended from the ceiling by silver chains. Four arched doorways stand in the east wall. One is ajar, and through it you can see shelves of books. Another door is covered by a curtain of beads, the third has heavy metal studs on it, and the fourth is open to reveal a long tunnel with light at the far end. A passage of plain, unmarked stone leads down several steps in the west wall.

The four arched doorways along the east wall are illusions hiding four deep alcoves. The illusions are:

Illusory room A: The half-open door leads to a vast library with bookshelves as high as the ceiling.

Illusory room B: This door is sturdy, studded, and not locked. Beyond the door, a 10′ × 30′ room holds a choice selection of armor and weapons.

Illusory room C: In the 20′x10′ room beyond the bead curtain, two women can be seen: a swaying belly dancer with her back to the door, and a woman sitting cross-legged while playing a stringed instrument.

Illusory room D: Beyond the open doorway lies a tunnel to the outside. Light is visible at the far end.

None of the rooms beyond the arched doorways actually exist. Only the passage that leads to area 15 is real.

When a PC enters an illusory room the door disappears, trapping the adventurer within a hollow crystal. (The PC passes through the outer shell of the crystal via a special one-way *passwall* spell created by Nazir.) Everyone outside the alcove can see the illusion drop, replaced by another illusion of a solid stone wall. PCs who successfully disbelieve the illusory stone wall can see their comrade trapped within a 9'-high, 5'-wide crystal prison. Nauseating blue gas fills the crystal in three rounds, freezing the occupant in stasis. The crystal prison (AC 5) can be broken by 10 hp damage from a single attack.

Each alcove contains its own crystal prison. These are identical to the crystal prisons found in area 17 of the fortress.

The crystal shards that illuminate this chamber are real and have *continual light* spells cast on them. There are 12 crystals, each worth 100 gp. The silver chains from which these crystals hang are worth 125 gp each.

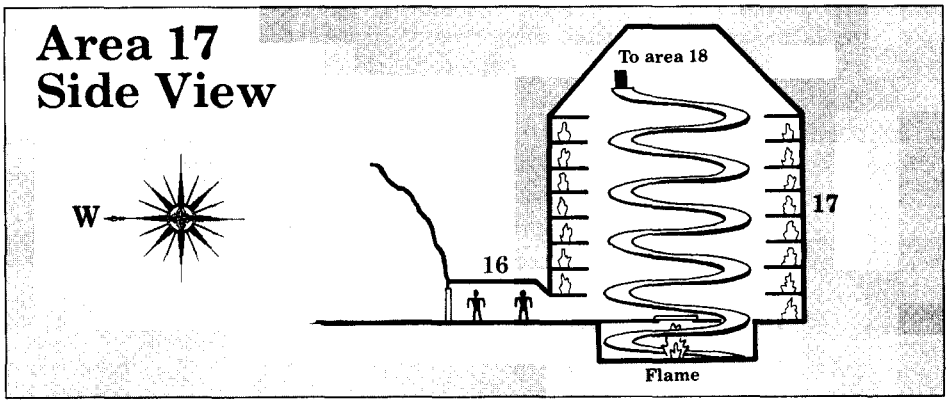
15. Cell Block. This passage runs for 80' and is lined with narrow prison cells. These are all empty unless the DM wishes to detail occupants relevant to further adventures. Nazir places captives within these cells, where he questions them until they outlive their usefulness. He then unlocks their cell doors and allows them to escape to the trap chamber. There, the different illusions entice the former prisoners to trap themselves within the crystal prisons, which links their life force to the White Flame. (See area 17 of the fortress.)

16. Guarded Corridor.

> The doors open onto a 40'-long corridor with two pairs of crystal statues facing each other along the walls. The figures are finely depicted warriors with their arms folded across their chests. Each hand holds a sharp crystal scimitar. At the far end of the corridor, an eerily lit vaulted chamber can be seen.

These four crystal living statues guard the Chamber of the Flame (area 17). They have instructions to attack anyone in the corridor who is not wearing one of Nazir's *rings of returning* or who is not escorted by at least two others wearing these rings.

Crystal living statues (4): AC 4; HD 3 (M); hp 15 each; MV 90' (30'); #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (fists) or 1d8/1d8 (crystal scimitars); Save F3; ML 11; INT 7; AL L; XP 35; RC/208.



17. Chamber of the Flame.

> You stand just inside a huge, 100'-wide octagonal room. The walls are lined with row upon row of tall crystals, most of which seem to have people trapped inside. Coiling around the middle of the room, a spiral metal ramp disappears up into darkness and down into a circular pit. White light flickers from below and is refracted around the chamber by a 10'-wide crystal disk suspended directly over the pit between four stone walkways.

The metal ramp spirals upward to a height of 100', going past nine levels of crystal prisons (40 prisons per level, except the first level, which has 35). About two-thirds of the crystals are occupied; the remainder are waiting to be moved to area 14 of the fortress.

The crystal prisons contain people and creatures captured by Nazir's followers. While they are trapped, their life energy is gradually fed to the White Flame. The prisoners are all in stasis but exhibit the effects of hideous diseases and deformities. Any victim not rescued within a day of imprisonment is permanently linked to the Flame and is beyond recovery by any means short of a *wish*. If any of the crystals here are smashed, the bodies inside disintegrate into a vile, odorous sludge.

The spiral ramp descends into the pit and ascends to the mage's living quarters above. If the PCs approach the pit, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> In the center of the 15'-deep, 50'-diameter pit burns a bright white flame. Outcrops of natural crystal jut unevenly from the floor and walls around it. In front of the flame stands a badly wounded man in torn, blood-stained desert robes. As he steps into the flame, ecstasy dances across his face, and all his wounds are healed. He steps out refreshed. Two other men in white desert robes and armed with bows stand beside the flame.

All three men are more of Nazir's guards, armed with short swords and short bows. They recently returned from a raid and were using the Flame to heal their wounds. If the PCs made a lot of noise before entering the room, such as engaging the crystal living statues in combat, the guards are vigilantly scanning the edge of the pit with raised bows, ready to shoot. If the party entered quietly, the PCs might be able to surprise the guards.

The guards are immune to non-magical weapons after years of exposure to the White Flame (see below) and will try to heal any wounds during combat by reentering the Flame. If the fight becomes desperate, one of them will stand in the Flame to negate any damage he takes instantly. (Only one person at a time can enter the Flame.)

If captured, Nazir's men refuse to be helpful because they do not believe that Nazir can be defeated. They boast about their master's power and say that the party cannot offer them more than he does.

Nazir's followers (3): AC 9; T7; hp 26 (Faran), 25 (Kharaj), 21 (Mahib); MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type (1d6); Save T7; ML 11; INT 9; AL C; XP 1,250; *ring of returning,* short sword, short bow, 10 arrows each, empty poison bottle, 150 gp in pouch (Faran only).

18. Connecting Corridor. The ramp curves through a hole in the roof and enters a long corridor that is softly lit by glowing crystals. Four copper-bound doors lead off, and at the far end of the corridor a flight of stone stairs leads upward.

19. Nazir's Private Chambers.

This magically lit chamber is furnished with a large desk, a cupboard, a woven rug on the floor, and a patterned tapestry on one wall. On the far wall, to the left of a plain door, a narrow shelf holds a pair of silver goblets and a wine bottle. A small monkey is sprawled asleep on a comfortable stuffed chair. An empty bottle lies on the floor beneath the chair.

The monkey is Salim, Nazir's apprentice until the mage *polymorphed* him 20 years ago as punishment for breaking a crystal prison. Salim was instructed to guard the wizard's private rooms but was tempted by a bottle of potent wine and is now drunk. He can speak if the PCs wake him. If the PCs can convince Salim that they are powerful enough to defeat Nazir, he will be helpful. Depending on his treatment (threats will gain little, promises to turn him human again will be better received), he will reveal some or all of the following information:

- He is not a familiar, so it will not benefit the party to kill him.
- Nazir's power comes from the white flame that is fed by the crystals.
- Nazir gets very angry if any crystals get broken.
- Under the rug, there is a safe with a horrible trap on it. (He does not know the exact nature of the trap but will make lurid guesses.)
- Nazir is currently in his observatory at the top of the stairs.
- Nazir keeps a crystal statue, the likeness of his daughter Aurelia, in the observatory. Salim does not know what became of Aurelia, although he suspects she died many years ago.
- The command phrase to open the observatory door is "tahrik min qad" (meaning "moving through flame").

The desk contains an ink well, a quill pen, a small bowl of sand, and a ledger bound in black leather with a white flame embossed on the cover. This book holds Nazir's accounts, commissions, and payments for the last four or five centuries.

The cupboard is locked and holds half a dozen robes, a cheese-wire garrotte, a vial of cobra venom (see area 3 of the fortress), a blow pipe with six *needle darts +1,* and a *jambiya +1.* All the items have a white flame emblazoned on them.

Under the rug, a hidden compartment contains a *wizard locked* safe protected by an explosive trap (5d4 hp damage to all within 5′; save vs. breath weapon for half damage). The safe contains Nazir's spellbooks, a small box containing 300 pp, and an essay (written by Nazir) explaining the relationship between the White Flame and the crystal prisons. If the PCs can read the essay (which takes two hours), they can learn all the information about the White Flame in the sidebar on this page. The DM must decide whether the PCs are disturbed in the course of their reading.

The spellbooks contain all of Nazir's memorized spells plus 3-30 (3d10) levels of spells chosen by the DM. If anyone other than Nazir opens one of these books, it magically *teleports* away courtesy of a programmed *teleport any object* spell.

Salim (*polymorphed* monkey): AC 7; M2; hp 7; MV 120′ (40′); #AT 1; Dmg 1-2; Save M2; ML 6; INT 13; AL C; XP 25. Spells: *light, ventriloquism.* Salim is presently too drunk to cast spells but will sober up in two hours.

20. Nazir's Bedchamber. This 20′ × 30′ room contains a luxurious canopied bed. On a low table by the bed stands an oil lamp and an incense burner. There is nothing here of value, and the bed is too cumbersome to be worth carrying down the ramp and out of the fortress.

21. Aurelia's Chambers. Behind the locked door is a blank stone wall. Behind the wall lie the dusty private quarters of Nazir's daughter, which the wizard sealed off with a 5′-thick *wall of stone* in his rage at her elopement.

Aurelia's chambers contain lavish furnishings covered with dust and cob-

webs. None of the rooms' contents are magical or particularly valuable.

22. Dining Hall. An unlocked door leads to an impressive dining room with a polished wooden table and elaborately carved chairs. An expensive rug (worth 5,000 gp) lies on the floor, and four tapestries (500 gp each) hang on the walls. The room is otherwise empty.

23. Bathroom. An unlocked door leads to a tiled chamber with a sunken bath. The two doors in the south wall lead to a sauna and a privy.

24. Odd Stairs. From the bottom, these stairs appear to be normal (albeit long). As the PCs ascend, it seems that either the stairs are getting bigger or the PCs are getting smaller! This is merely an architectural optical illusion, for the steps do increase in size (width and height). Any PC who makes a successful Intelligence check should realize the true situation.

A pressure pad on the middle stair activates a silent alarm that can be heard only in Nazir's quarters (areas 19 and 20) and the observatory (area 25). The alarm warns Nazir of visitors and alerts him to scry on this location and prepare appropriate spells.

At the top of the stairs, 30'-tall double doors open on a command phrase ("tahrik min qad") but can also be forced open by a *knock* spell or three successful open-doors rolls in the same round.

25. Observatory. Unless he has been drawn elsewhere, Nazir is indeed in his observatory. The course of the final encounter will vary depending on the party's prior actions. Here are the possibilities:

- If the PCs snuffed out the Flame, Nazir is weakened (possibly stunned if the PCs come here directly).
- If Nazir has been alerted to the PCs' presence by the alarm on the stairs or some other means, and has a few rounds to prepare, he will cast the following spells by the time the PCs arrive: *ESP, mirror image, fly.*
- If the PCs have been so discreet that opening the observatory doors is the first indication Nazir has of their presence, he has time to cast only a *mirror image* spell as the doors open.

In any case, Nazir is unaware of the beholder's location. He does not know the sultan is coming unless the party inadvertently reveals his presence, and Nazir cannot visualize the beholder well enough to scry him. (He saw the beholder only once, briefly, when he *polymorphed* him centuries ago.) However, the observatory is obscured by a *hallucinatory terrain* spell from the outside, making it difficult for the sultan to find.

In addition to the powers afforded to him by the White Flame, Nazir also used a powerful ritual to place his own heart within his daughter's statue. This renders his body indestructible unless his heart is returned to his body or the statue is destroyed. In game terms, Nazir takes damage normally, although the White Flame has rendered him immune to nonmagical weapons. However, he cannot die and functions normally at negative hit points despite showing all the wounds inflicted on him. Based on the situation, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> You see a vast observatory with a domed ceiling of clear crystal panels. Facing you from behind a large marble table are five identical bearded men in black robes with golden sashes. Each of them holds a crystal-headed staff in one hand, while the other hand rests on the hilt of a jambiya tucked at his waist. A black ring with a white flame adorns the right forefinger of each man. Directly behind the quintet of wizards is a clear pink statue of a beautiful young woman in a bridal gown. Within her chest beats a heart-shaped red light.
>
> A giant spyglass on a tripod points upward at a cloudless sky. A low, glass-fronted bookcase sits against the opposite wall, and a crystal ball, star charts, maps and gauges lie on the table. On the floor are several silk cushions and a fine rug, an incense burner and a bowl of fruit.

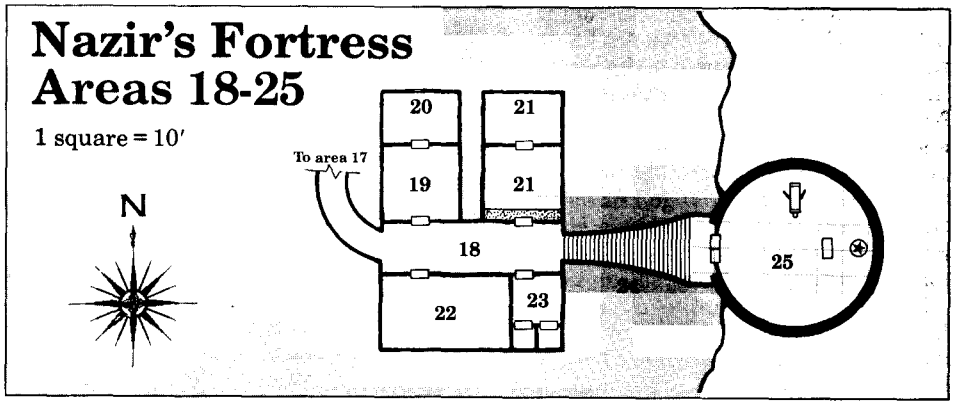
The White Flame

The White Flame gives out no heat, but bathing in it cures wounds, disease, and poisoning by passing these effects on to the occupants of the crystal prisons. Years of exposure to the Flame attunes a person to it, arresting the effects of aging and conferring invulnerability to nonmagical weapons. Centuries of continued action by the Flame creates the crystal outcrops around the pit. These eventually grow big enough to act as crystal prisons, such as the ones in area 14 of the fortress, and are then moved to the recesses in the walls of this chamber or other rooms as Nazir requires.

Since Nazir relies on the power of the Flame for his continued existence, he can be weakened by extinguishing the Flame. Since the Flame is fed by the life energy stolen by the crystal prisons, putting a crystal prison into the Flame effectively creates a magical "feedback" as the Flame tries to restore energy and drain it at the same time. This stress causes the crystal prison to explode after 1-3 rounds of exposure and snuffs out the Flame for 1-4 hours. As soon as the Flame goes out, Nazir immediately loses four levels and is stunned for 1-4 turns. When he recovers his senses, he will use his *crystal ball* to see what has happened. When he realizes that intruders are in his fortress, he will quickly prepare to meet them. Smashing all of the crystals will permanently extinguish the Flame, but such a project would take 1-4 hours, make tremendous noise, and bring Nazir down on the PCs with a vengeance.

The Crystal Disk and the *Rings of Returning*

The crystal disk suspended above the Flame is a *teleportation* device constructed by Nazir. It is unaffected by nonmagical weapons and can withstand 40 hp of magical damage before being destroyed. Only Nazir himself can activate it and command the disk to *teleport* anyone standing on it to any location he can see or scry. He has fashioned several *rings of returning* that he and his followers wear. The rings are black with a white flame-shaped crystal. By rotating this small crystal, teleportees wearing a ring can return to the disk from anywhere they have been sent. In addition, many of the magical defenses in the fortress (areas 2, 13, and 16) are designed to allow free passage to anyone wearing a *ring of returning*.



The statue is Firouz's beloved Aurelia. Five centuries ago, Nazir cast a *flesh to stone* spell on her, changing her to a rose quartz statue. Her fragile form (AC 10; hp 10) has been tightly enclosed in a permanent *force field*. She is wearing a *ring of wishes* on the ring finger of her left hand. (The ring belongs to Nazir, who keeps it safe on her finger while he wears his other two rings. There is only one *wish* left in the ring.) The red light within Aurelia's chest is her father's heart. If she is shattered, the wizard will die instantly, but the DM should discourage this because the beholder will go mad if he sees his love in fragments. If Firouz is present, he will protect Aurelia as best as he can using his eye-beams, whether or not he has control of them.

The bookcase is *wizard locked*. The books cover a variety of subjects including astrology, history, fabulous beasts, and so; the collection is worth as much as 2,500 gp to an interested sage. The crystal ball is the magical item of the same name, the rug is a *flying carpet*, and the spyglass is nonmagical (worth 1,000 gp). A lever on the wall behind the statue opens a section of the dome and creates an opening in the permanent *force field* that protects the structure.

The bearded man is, of course, Nazir al-Azrad (seen in the company of his *mirror images*). Although he could probably kill the party outright, he would rather recruit them to his service or feed them to his crystals. Unless the PCs have weakened him, he behaves reasonably and points out their inability to harm him. He readily lies and makes false promises to get the party on his side. If the PCs insist that he restore Aurelia, he claims that he regrets what he did in anger and has spent years trying to turn her back. This is a lie, for he still resents his daughter's betrayal. If Nazir cannot persuade the PCs to join him, he wants to capture them to power his crystals.

Nazir al-Azrad: AC −1; M19; hp 50; MV 120' (40'); #AT 1; Dmg by spell or weapon type; S 13, I 18, W 17, D 16, C 15, Ch 14; Save M19; ML 11; AL C; XP 19,425; *staff of power* (34 charges), *jambiya +2, bracers of defense AC 4, ring of protection +3, ring of returning, efreeti bottle* (currently empty; see area 7).

Spells: *charm person* (×2), *light, magic missile* (×2), *ventriloquism; detect invisible, ESP, invisibility, mirror image, web; dispel magic, fly, haste, hold person, slow; confusion, dimension door, polymorph other* (×2), *polymorph self; feeblemind, hold monster, magic jar, telekinesis; disintegrate, flesh to stone, geas; power word stun, teleport any object; force field, polymorph any object.*

In combat, Nazir tries to incapacitate rather than kill. He uses spells to keep the PCs from reaching him while he bombards them with spells to immobilize them. If hard pressed, he will use his *ring of returning* to retreat to area 17 and cure his wounds in the White Flame. He will not leave his fortress or allow the PCs to remain in his observatory for long.

If the White Flame has been snuffed out, Nazir's statistics change as follows:

Nazir al-Azrad (if weakened): M15; hp 35; S 8, C 11; Save M15; ML 8.

Spells: *charm person, light, magic missile* (×2), *ventriloquism; detect invisible, ESP, invisibility, web; dispel magic, fly, haste, hold person; confusion, dimension door, polymorph other, polymorph self; hold monster, magic jar, telekinesis; flesh to stone, geas; teleport any object.*

Eye, the Jury

The DM should arrange for the beholder to arrive at a suitable time, either when Nazir is trussed and bound or if the PCs are about to be defeated. It has taken Firouz some time to find the observatory, as it is hidden by illusion. (Whether he finds it deliberately or accidentally is up to the DM.) On the way, he has been practicing his gaze abilities, especially his anti-magic ray.

If the PCs have defeated Nazir, Firouz appears outside the dome and calls to the adventurers to let him in. Once inside, he instantly recognizes Aurelia and begs the party to do something to help her. While his heart is protected inside Aurelia's statue, Nazir cannot be intimidated into revealing how Aurelia can be freed. Allow the party time to come up with the idea that the beholder's anti-magic ray can remove the spell. If the PCs are stumped, Firouz threatens to disintegrate Nazir unless he cooperates. When Nazir claims that his death will only insure Aurelia's destruction (a lie), Firouz changes his mind and cannot be convinced to harm the wizard. Even if he did want to harm the wizard, Firouz has spent so much time practicing his anti-magic ray that he has not yet mastered his other eye-beams.

If Nazir has incapacitated most of the party and it looks as if the PCs will lose, Firouz appears outside the dome, directly behind Nazir, and fires his anti-magic ray through the glass, dispelling the protective *force field* around the structure. The beholder's rays are refracted by the crystal dome, hitting random targets but missing Nazir. If the PCs have been magically incapacitated, the rays will free them. If the PCs let the beholder in, Firouz floods the observatory with his anti-magic ray to prevent Nazir's escape. Otherwise, the beholder must first use his disintegration ray to make a hole in the dome (which may take some time), giving Nazir time to use his *dimension door* spell or magical ring to escape. After healing himself in the White Flame, Nazir returns to destroy the intruders, taking out the beholder first.

Heart's Desire

If Firouz fires his anti-magic ray before Nazir escapes, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As the strange light from the beholder's central eye touches the statue, the red heart-shaped light within it winks out. The figure shimmers as it is transformed into a beautiful raven-haired woman. At the same instant she swoons, Nazir shudders, clutching his chest.

Nazir is now vulnerable and will feel any damage he has taken. If he has already been reduced to negative hit points, he collapses to the floor and dies immediately. If he survives his daughter's "awakening," he realizes the danger he is in and begs for mercy. He warn the group that Aurelia will revert to crystal as soon as the beholder's antimagic ray ceases to fall on her—which is true. Nazir is vengeful and untrustworthy. The DM must decide if he keeps any promises he makes to the PCs, based on how well the players role-play.

Both Aurelia and Firouz can be permanently restored to their true forms using the *ring of wishes* on her finger. The one *wish* remaining must be properly phrased, something like, "I wish the enchantments Nazir al-Azrad placed upon Aurelia and Firouz were forever revoked."

Alternative Ending

Some DMs might prefer the following ending to using the *ring of wishes* as a solution. Although unorthodox, this ending fits the style of the *Arabian Nights*:

The beholder deactivates his central eye-beam, and his beloved instantly recrystallizes. Firouz hovers over the statue of his beloved, a tear welling in his huge eye. The tear rolls down his monstrous face and falls onto the crystal. From where the tear fell, the statue begins to revert to flesh, and in a moment the beautiful Aurelia steps down from the statue's base. A look of surprise crosses her face for an instant. Then she looks into the wide eye of the beholder, whispers "Firouz," and kisses him gently. In a flash of light he is transformed into a handsome young man.

Concluding the Adventure

As soon as Firouz's heart's desire has been obtained, the room starts to spin and the PCs, Firouz, and Aurelia are transported back to the sultan's palace.

They appear in the throne room, in front of the *mirror of desire,* to the astonishment of Mustafa who is reclining on the pile of cushions while being fanned by a pair of gremlins as a third feeds him grapes. Mustafa recently plucked up enough courage to follow the party, and somehow managed to impress the gremlins after *charming* their shaman. They have decided that he is a powerful sorcerer and, since the "Eyeball" has gone away, have become his servants. With his new band of faithful followers, Mustafa is now even more puffed up with pride. He admonishes the party for leaving Princess Yasmin at the sultan's palace alone. The PCs will have to deal with this situation as they see fit, but Firouz will do his best to appease the presumptuous vizier.

Princess Yasmin is now free of the sultan's *charm,* and Firouz suggests a double wedding for himself and Aurelia and Princess Yasmin and her beloved Prince Harith. The ex-brides of the beholder are also restored when the curse is lifted. They are most grateful to the PCs for freeing them and beg to be escorted back to their homes.

If Nazir survives and escapes the party's clutches, he may return to trouble the PCs in the future. But that is another tale.

The Rewards of Chivalry

If the PCs succeed in undoing Nazir's curse and reuniting the lovers Firouz and Aurelia, the DM should give the party a story award of 10,000 XP. However, if the PCs defeat Nazir by destroying Aurelia, they should get only half this amount. The destruction of his beloved drives Firouz mad (again), and the PCs should receive no experience for the ensuing fight with the beholder. For the rescue of Princess Yasmin, the party should receive 5,000 XP. Lastly, for escorting the beholder's brides safely back to their homes, an additional 1,000 XP may be awarded (more if the DM decides to turn this into a full-blown adventure).

The PCs will encounter nothing else on their trip to Samarkand, where Prince Harith eagerly awaits the arrival of his beloved Yasmin. If the PCs tell Harith about their ordeal, he rewards the party with the princess's dowry once the wedding has taken place. Firouz is also eager to reward the PCs, although he has little to offer them at this time. With his former sultanate in ruins, he is happy to spend his days with Aurelia in Sasan or Samarkand, far from the desolation and dark memories of his former palace (although he will not leave his *mirror of desire* behind). This leaves the qal'at open to a variety of monsters seeking sanctuary from the scorching desert of Algarin. The PCs may wish to explore the qal'at again at a later date.

If the PCs obtained one or more of Nazir's *rings of returning,* they may be able to *teleport* to Nazir's fortress and use the White Flame as a source of healing or rejuvenation. However, the rings immediately lose their power when Nazir dies. If he survives the adventure, Nazir may destroy the crystal disk in area 17 of the fortress, just to keep the PCs from returning to his lair. Ω

BACK TO THE BEACH

Continued from page 24

Beach of White Sand:

The antiquarians may be glad the matter of the crabmen has been settled, but they may still require an escort or guards for their second visit. When they arrive, newer finds may present themselves, perhaps buildings not yet uncovered from the sand dunes. (What became of the goldsmiths and silversmiths that attracted the pirates to the monastery?) Or the PCs may find the hull of a beached ship buried by wind and waves years before. (Weren't winter visits by pirates dangerous in uncertain weather conditions?)

The visitors may also be menaced by sahuagin who land here in a large underwater craft to hunt crabmen. Apart from aiding the Tribe against their enemies, and protecting the king's men, the adventurers might need to rescue slaves held in the craft before the poor unfortunates are carried to their deaths in the sahuagins' home far beneath the waves. Ω

FELKOVIC'S CAT

BY PAUL CULOTTA

Are seven lives enough to wreak its vengeance?

Artwork by Bob Klasnich

The forest is not quiet tonight. Harsh panting rasps from the old man's chest as he staggers through the dense underbrush. Behind him comes the scream of a large predatory cat. His pursuer might be hundreds of yards away, but to the man it seems like only a few feet and he quickens his pace. How can he hope to outrun this demonic pursuit? The cat yowls again, closer this time.

The man runs headlong into a tree in the darkness. Thinking as quickly as his overstrained mind can manage, he scrambles up through the branches, but it is too late. A black flash of fur and claws leaps incredibly high and pulls the man off his leafy perch. With a scream of terror and a sickening crunch, the man hits the ground.

Miraculously, he rolls over and tries to get to his feet, but his left leg dangles loosely and will not support him. Frantically, he looks about him, trying to pierce the darkness with his merely human vision. Where is the beast that has been chasing him? In its place at the base of the tree stands Baron von Kharkov, whose bright yellow eyes twinkle with amusement in stark contrast to his swarthy skin. His smile is inviting and warm, a full toothy grin. The baron gives a throaty chuckle as he shakes his head and removes his gloves, revealing pawlike hands with hard, sharp claws.

"Did you fall from the tree, Yosef? Ah, your leg, it is hurt. Here, let me see if I can ease your pain," the baron purrs.

The forest is not quiet. A howling—not of panthers but of a man—echoes through the forest, punctuated by sobbing pleas for mercy and the baron's hearty laugh. After an hour, this pitiless duet mercifully ends, but there is no one to see the inky form of a great black panther with a bloody muzzle silently padding back to Castle Pantara. This is the wilderness of Valachan, and for now the forest is quiet.

"Felkovic's Cat" is an AD&D® game RAVENLOFT® adventure for 4-6 player characters of levels 6-9 (about 36 total levels). All PCs should be good or neutrally aligned, and one should be a priest. The adventurers need magical weapons to defeat the powerful undead and other monsters they will encounter.

Prior to running the adventure, the DM should review published information on Valachan, von Kharkov, and the *cat of Felkovic* in the RAVENLOFT setting boxed set; the material on Baron Urik

von Kharkov in RR1 *Darklords*, pages 54-59; and the information on nosferatu vampires in the new *Monstrous Compendium*®: RAVENLOFT Appendix III (MC15 *Creatures of Darkness*). Additionally, the DM should review the information on "anchoring" a ghost in *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts* (VRGG), pages 22-24. *Van Richten's Guide to Vampires* may also prove helpful. If these sources are unavailable, enough information is presented here to run the adventure.

During this quest, the PCs enter the domain of Valachan in the Ravenloft demiplane and encounter Baron Urik von Kharkov, a ferocious and cruel nosferatu vampire. Like most lords of core domains, von Kharkov has several unusual powers and is nearly invincible. In Valachan, however, there is a special item that can destroy this awesome undead lord.

Only by defeating the baron can the PCs escape the Demiplane of Dread. If the PCs fall prey to the baron and his vassals, their fate will be so horrid as to defy description. The PCs' richest reward in this adventure will be escaping with lives and spirits intact.

For the Dungeon Master

Valachan is a domain of rough canyons, gullies, and heavy forests. Many dark-furred animals live within the gloomy shade of the trees: rabbits, moose, martens, boars, deer, bears—and predatory black panthers. Occasional farms or woodsman's huts dot the wilderness, but most of the people live in one of Valachan's three towns: Ungrad (population 1,500), Rotwald (population 4,000), and Habelnik (population 3,500). The people of Valachan, all humans, generally accept their lot in life, which is not unduly harsh. Those who do not accept their fate usually disappear or meet a violent and often slow death.

The ruler of the land is Baron Urik von Kharkov, a tall, dark-skinned nosferatu vampire whom some consider quite handsome. This manly beauty hides his unusual past: He was born as an ordinary black panther. In his youth, he was *polymorphed* into human form by a powerful red wizard of Thay. The evil wizard Morphayus sent Urik to the best schools in Cormyr, then encouraged his transformed pet to woo a woman who had spurned Morphayus' advances. While Urik and the woman were in a passionate embrace, the wizard cast a *dispel magic* spell. Urik reverted to panther form and tore his love to pieces.

After the wizard *polymorphed* the panther back to human form, Urik was horrified at his deed and fled into the mists of Ravenloft. He emerged in Darkon, where he learned about vampirism. Urik longed for immortality—endless years to wreak havoc on a world that had treated him badly. In Darkon he got his wish, and gained a reputation for inflicting extreme pain and suffering on his victims. When his vampire master was destroyed, Urik fled again into the mists, emerging in a new domain created just for him by the dark powers of the demiplane.

Since that time, Baron von Kharkov has laired in Castle Pantara, which resembles the body of a large cat. He keeps a few younger nosferatu vampires and one vampire elf as slaves, to guard the castle and keep watch on his yearly bride. From time to time, reluctant villagers are called to service in the castle, doing routine cleaning and maintenance, pickling and preserving vegetables, and providing nightly snacks for von Kharkov and his vampire slaves.

Most natural animals shy away from undead, but the panthers of Valachan freely associate with the undead of Castle Pantara. Indeed, Baron von Kharkov's origin as a panther has given him unusual abilities with all kinds of cats. He can enter a trance and experience (but not control) everything that a specific cat experiences. He also can summon 2-5 normal black panthers to serve him. Finally, instead of assuming the form of a wolf or bat like other vampires, von Kharkov can shapechange only into a large, powerful panther that can leap up to 30'.

There is one cat in Valachan, however, that the baron has no control over.

The Tale of Felkovic and His Cat

Among Valachan's citizens were the wizard Felkovic and his beautiful wife, Nadia. Despite an age difference of 12 years, Nadia kept her older husband feeling young through her wit, charm, and grace, and Felkovic often thanked his deity for such good fortune. Even under the baron's stern rule, the wizard and his wife lived happily—until the baron decided that he wanted Nadia for himself.

It was quite by accident that Felkovic discovered the baron's plan. He was having a cup of tea at the Crispy Pickle Tavern in his home town of Habelnik, when he overheard two of the baron's guards plotting against him. Felkovic was to be taken away quietly one night. Later, the guards would take torn and bloody pieces of his clothing to Nadia, saying that they feared the wizard had been killed and eaten by panthers from the forest. A month later, Baron von Kharkov would select her as his bride, getting the woman he wanted while creating the impression that he was a charitable lord who was taking in and providing for a widow.

Felkovic quietly slipped out of the inn and went home. He already had suspicions about the baron, because so many people who served in the castle came back with horrible nightmares and a sickness called white fever. Ten years before, a revolt in Rotwald had ended in brutal suppression; the surviving rebels had suffered grisly executions. As long as he had not been bothered, Felkovic had ignored the baron's affairs. Those who showed too much curiosity had a way of disappearing. The overheard threat to his family was another matter, but saving his wife from the baron seemed hopeless. No one had ever escaped Valachan, and the baron and his henchmen—known as the Black Leopards—were so powerful that Felkovic's spells seemed insignificant.

Desperately, Felkovic researched long and hard into arcane works that he had never before dared to open. After several days of study, he opened his coffers and used every coin and jewel he had to buy the materials he needed to create a powerful magical item that could defeat the baron. When all was assembled, he sent Nadia to her mother's home in Rotwald, and he locked himself in his tower. For the next few days, all of Felkovic's neighbors stayed clear as lights, explosions, and strange noises (sounding like the yowling of cats) burst from the tower windows. At the end of the week, dark clouds boiled through the night sky, lightning bolts struck metal rods affixed to the tower roof, and more bright flashes illuminated the window frames. Then all was quiet.

Inside, in the wreckage of his workshop, Felkovic proudly held a small jade figurine shaped like a cat. Despite its innocent appearance, the 1"-tall statuette had tremendous destructive potential. When thrown to the ground and a command word ("Longteeth") uttered, the *cat* would animate into an enchanted saber-toothed tiger. ·

The wizard felt so confident of his creation that he decided to go to Castle Pantara then and there to unleash the *cat* and eliminate the baron. Slipping the figurine into his pocket of his robe, he turned to grab his hat—and found himself staring into two glowing yellow feline eyes that were deep pools inviting friendship and camaraderie. It was his good friend Baron von Kharkov, come to investigate all the fuss and noise.

The baron invited the hopelessly *charmed* wizard to Castle Pantara for a spot of tea and game of chess, and Felkovic was honored by the invitation. During the ride in the baron's carriage, they had a wonderful talk about the weather, Nadia's health and whereabouts, prospects for the crops, and all the recent noisy commotion in Habelnik. Felkovic smoothed over this last subject with a half truth ("a new process, my lord, for making small statuettes") because he was so ashamed that he had thought ill of his good friend.

Von Kharkov thought no more of it and kept up the chatter until they got to the courtyard of Castle Pantara. As the two men got down from the coach, the baron gave a sharp whistle. Four panthers emerged from the shadows and quickly knocked Felkovic down. Between them and the baron (who had assumed his panther form), there was soon nothing left of the wizard. Felkovic never had a chance to pull the *cat* statuette from his pocket; it fell to the ground and was knocked aside in the panther's first rush.

As he died, Felkovic was outraged at how he had been fooled. All of his hard work had been wasted, and his beloved Nadia would now fall into the hands of this evil lord. With his final breath, the wizard hissed, "Damn you, von Kharkov! May you die by claw and tooth!" His emotion was so strong that Felkovic's spirit lingered after his death, becoming a vengeful ghost anchored to the wizard's most precious possession and the one item capable of carrying out the curse: the jade cat figurine.

Felkovic discovered, however, that his ghostly power was quite limited. Because of the figurine's powerful magic, he could do nothing directly. In fact the ghost and figurine remained dormant until someone claimed ownership of it.

For weeks, the tiny jade cat lay in the courtyard; then two curious panther cubs found it. First they pawed at it, then they chased it across the cobblestones, swiping at it and yowling the whole time. The statuette made a great toy as it clattered and skipped along with the cubs in hot pursuit. Eventually, the statue suffered the fate of most cat toys. One of the cubs smacked it out of reach, right under a door. It was, in fact, the door to a tower, and inside was a stairway leading down to the castle's dungeons. The small statue slid across the floor, landed on the stairs, and tumbled all the way down to the bottom.

There it lay for several more months until one night the baron was wandering through his dungeon and found it. Being a cat lover, he took a fancy to the little statuette and put it on a shelf in his study, unaware that by doing so he had claimed ownership of the *cat* and had activated the angry spirit within.

The figurine animated and grew into a different (and larger) cat form each night for the next seven nights. Felkovic's spirit found that it could influence the timing of the *cat*'s animation so that it occurred when no one was around. Each night when the statue was transformed into living form, the *cat* was quite hungry. For six nights it hunted around the castle, killing rats at first, then stalking the woods for bigger prey. On the seventh night, the *cat* turned into its largest form, that of a saber-toothed tiger (smilodon), and went hunting for some real big game: von Kharkov himself.

The baron was puzzled at how this big cat had gotten into his castle, but he arrogantly let it attack, thinking that it could do him no harm. Von Kharkov was shocked to discover that the claws and teeth of this beast burned him like holy water. Worse yet, he found he could not turn into gaseous form and escape. Frantically, as the huge cat clawed and bit, von Kharkov screamed for his servants and they came running. Some of them had magical weapons that hurt the smilodon badly, and it reluctantly fled the castle. When it was several miles away, it reverted to figurine form and again became dormant.

It took the baron many nights to recover, as his wounds healed only after he drained blood from new victims. Several of the villagers working in his castle went home with bad cases of white fever, and some did not return home at all. When he had recovered, the baron posted a bounty of 500 pantherheads (a Valachan coin worth 2 gp) for the head of the cat. Although that was a hefty sum, none of the inhabitants of Valachan felt inclined to go hunting in the dark, panther-infested woods.

Eventually the *cat* was found by some unlikely new owners—a gang of orcs that had wandered into the mists of Ravenloft. As they were making their way through the thick forests, the orcs passed close to the jade statuette, and Felkovic's spirit pushed out with its mind to lure a new owner. Bundakai, the orc leader, felt the need to wander behind some nearby bushes and almost stepped on the figurine before he saw it. Thinking that the odd little cat might be worth a few gold pieces, he put it in his pouch. That night the statuette magically turned into a small cat, and on the following nights it got bigger and bigger. It even brought part of its kill to the orcs.

This went on each night until the seventh night, when the orcs were confronted by a huge saber-toothed tiger that wanted Bundakai for dinner. Within minutes, every member of the orc gang had been killed, and the smilodon was feasting on the orc leader. When the *cat* had eaten its fill, it reverted to statuette form and became dormant again (much to the relief of Felkovic's ghost, who had tired of the orcs' constant bickering and loathsome habits).

Thus, deep in the forests of Valachan, the *cat of Felkovic* waits for a new owner to fulfill its maker's curse against Baron von Kharkov.

Arriving in Ravenloft

If the PCs begin the adventure outside the Demiplane of Dread, the DM should incorporate a smooth transition that instills an air of mystery without giving away that the PCs are not where they used to be. The mists of Ravenloft may be mistaken for early morning ground fog, transporting the adventurers to Valachan before they realize that the road has taken them far from their original destination. Another option is to use a gate to Ravenloft, such as the ones known to exist in the ruins of ancient Myth Drannor in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® game setting. (See *The Ruins of Myth Drannor* boxed set.)

If the PCs are in Ravenloft at the start of the adventure, they can travel to Valachan from an adjacent land, or they can enter via the mists that border all domains on the demiplane. If this adventure is run as a sequel to "The Price of Revenge" (issue #42), the PCs will already be in Valachan. The two

adventurers have some differences, however, that must be examined to create a seamless campaign.

The vampires in "Price of Revenge" were the baron's slaves, and were looked upon by the townspeople of Ungrad as saviors who had restored good government and found the cure for white fever. Although von Kharkov allowed this experiment in benevolent government in a backwater town, it is not how he runs things elsewhere in Valachan. The baron is cruel and oppressive, and while he maintains a facade of benevolence, he rules with an iron fist (or paw). His henchmen, the Black Leopards, serve as a both espionage service and police force in the other two towns of Valachan. As related in *Darklords,* von Kharkov has ruthlessly suppressed several uprisings, and while it has been over 10 years since the last revolt, the people of Valachan still remember the harsh justice of the baron's minions.

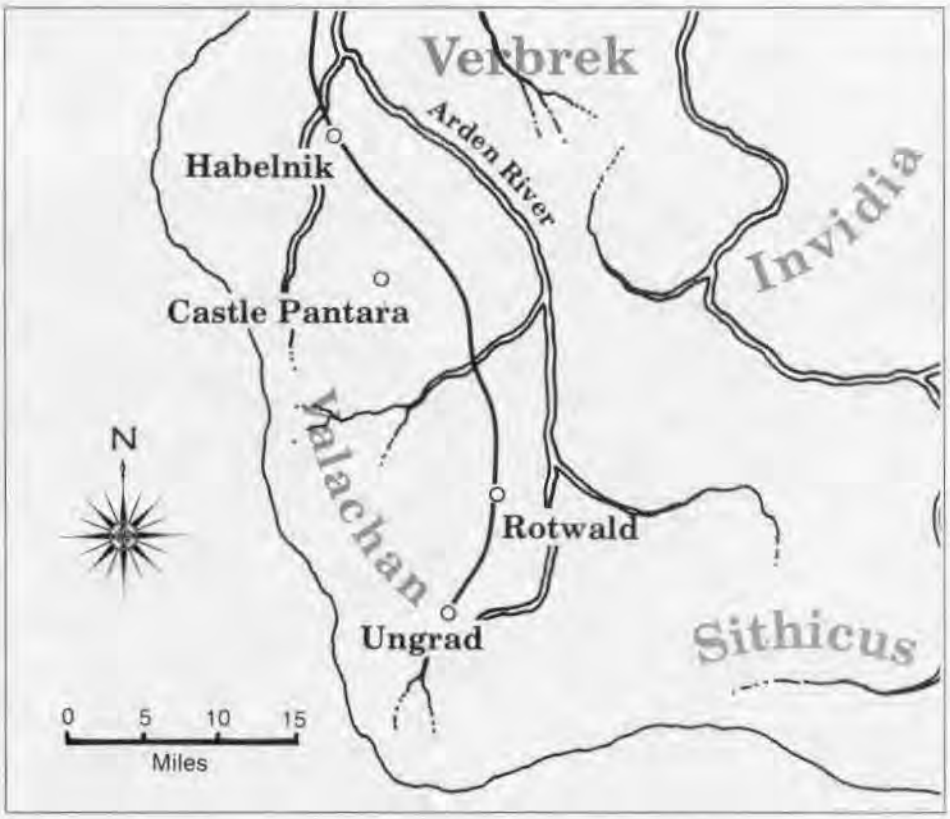
Thus, most Valachanese are not like the friendly folks in Ungrad. Indeed, as night falls, their mood gets more somber, and they go to bed early with the covers pulled over their heads.

One other small point: In south Valachan, there are many wolves about. This is unique to the Ungrad area. In west and central Valachan, black panthers abound, and the wolves stay away.

To begin the adventure, read, paraphrase, or alter the following to fit the DM's choice of transition into Ravenloft:

> You are in a thick forest of stately oaks, maples, and other leafy trees. It is cool here, and the leaves are beginning to turn to their autumn shades. Sprawled beneath a tree is a skeleton of some humanoid creature holding a broken, rusty sword. The fog is burning away but seems to linger in the thicker growth of the woods.

The skeleton was once an orc, judging from its cranial structure, teeth, and overall build. Its studded-leather armor was ripped to pieces; only fragments remain. Another orc skeleton lies just a few feet away, and even a hasty search reveals others. Altogether there are eight intact skeletons, plus a number of bones in a loose pile that would make up one additional orc. A quick examination of the bones in this pile reveals that they have been gnawed, cracked, and broken. Next to the bones lies a ripped pouch from which has spilled 8 gp, 10 sp, 12 cp, and a small jade figurine of a happy-looking cat.



Maximize the eeriness of the situation by describing the writing inscribed on the coins as unlike any the adventurers have ever seen. The cat statuette has no special markings but is finely crafted and looks valuable. It is 100% resistant to destructive magic, and the statuette radiates magic. The loose bones are the remains of Bundakai, the *cat*'s last meal.

In the unlikely event that the PCs leave the treasure, Felkovic's spirit sends an empathic suggestion to one of the PCs (preferably a wizard), luring her to pick up the *cat* and keep it. This ability to communicate telepathically is a modified form of a ghost's extraordinary powers to *charm* and to lure. (See *VRGG,* pages 37 and 44-45.) The DM must handle this communication discreetly and should take the player aside to describe the mental "push" her character feels. Resolve the situation through role-playing rather than by rolling saving throws to avoid the lure.

If the PCs proceed without the *cat,* all is not lost. They may come back to get it later, or they may defeat the baron without the *cat*'s help (a task that is considerably more difficult). The "Nadia's Visit" encounter (page 58) gives the PCs a hint for defeating von Kharkov.

From this point on, the PCs are on their own to explore Valachan and to determine what is going on. Several things will occur, however. First, Felkovic's spirit suggests that the adventurer who has picked up the *cat* should travel south. The spirit realizes that he is in northern Valachan but does not know exactly where. By heading south, the party will run into Habelnik, Felkovic's hometown. Once there, he will guide the PCs to Castle Pantara.

It is a one-day walk to Habelnik, about 12 miles over rough ground. The DM should let the players role-play in that town to get information, then run "The Lottery" planned encounter on the evening of the second night.

No matter where the PCs are—in town or in the wilderness—the *cat of Felkovic* becomes a living cat every night. If the PCs don't answer its hungry yowls with food, it goes off on its own to hunt, bringing its kill back to the PCs' camp. If a fire or stove is available, the *cat* indicates to the PCs through its growls and actions that it wants its meat cooked.

Felkovic's Cat Forms

Each night, the *cat of Felkovic* assumes a living form as described below, until the PCs prove themselves worthy to Felkovic's spirit. (See the sidebar on page 53.) The DM may need to modify these descriptions to fit the PCs' actions and locations. For example, if the PCs stay overnight in an inhabited area, and the description says that the *cat* kills and brings back a deer, the DM should instead have the *cat* kill a large dog. In every instance, the *cat* reverts to figurine form two hours after feeding.

First Night: As the adventurers make camp, the PC who picked up the *cat of Felkovic* (referred to in this adventure as the cat's owner) feels movement in the pouch or knapsack in which the figurine was placed. Soon a tiger-striped domestic cat pops out of the container, meowing pitifully for food. If the PCs don't feed it, the *cat* runs away and returns a few minutes later with a plump field mouse. It nudges its prize close to the campfire, waits for a while, turn the mouse over with a paw, lets it cook a while longer, and then eats it. Later, the *cat* nestles close to its owner and purrs loudly. A PC with a *speak with animals* spell may wish to talk to the *cat*. This will work, although a *charm mammal* or *animal friendship* spell will not. Until the wizard reveals himself, Felkovic's ghost will speak only as a cat.

Second Night: Felkovic's spirit gives the *cat*'s owner a mental push, suggesting the owner remove the figurine from whatever container it has been stored in. Once freed, the figurine becomes a giant lynx that yowls hungrily. If no food is forthcoming, it bounds off into the woods and returns with a rabbit. If Felkovic's spirit sees that the PCs are short on food, the lynx goes hunting again until it has brought back a rabbit or squirrel for each PC.

If the PC ignores the mental push and leaves the figurine confined for two rounds, the *cat*'s adopts living form within the PC's clothes or pack, clawing its way out and destroying the container in the process.

Third Night: After the mental warning, the *cat* grows to panther size and bounds off into the night. An hour later, the PCs hears the scream of the panther in the distance, and soon thereafter the *cat* returns to camp dragging a small deer. When the "Nadia's Visit" encounter is run, the *cat* will have already turned into figurine form after feeding, but will reemerge in panther form to fight the undead. (See page 58.)

Fourth Night: The *cat* transforms into a jaguar tonight. It runs into the woods, returning an hour later proudly dragging a dead boar. Pork was one of Felkovic's favorite dishes; as the PCs cook the boar, the jaguar looks on hungrily and licks its chops. Felkovic likes his pork well done, and the *cat* will insist (through suitable growls and snarls) that the meat not be removed from the fire until properly cooked.

Fifth Night: Tonight the *cat* becomes a large tiger, and it is not as friendly as before. (Felkovic is getting surly because the PCs have not proven themselves after five days.) It takes off with a snarl and returns later with the leg and haunch of some large creature. A ranger, druid, or PC with hunting proficiency may determine that the meat came from a moose. The tiger cooks the meat, much like the cat on the first night, and it is not in a mood to share. PCs who get too close to the *cat* on this night receive a menacing snarl and perhaps even a nip from the tiger's sharp teeth.

Sixth Night: Tonight Felkovic provides no mental warning prior to the *cat*'s transformation. Felkovic's spirit is quite impatient with the adventurers. The *cat* transforms into a large spotted lion that takes off without giving the PCs a second glance. When it returns an hour later, its muzzle is bloody and it gives itself a good bath. It does not return to its owner until good and ready to go back to figurine form, and anyone who approaches it is swatted by a heavy paw.

Seventh Night: This is the night of reckoning. If the PCs have not yet been greeted by Felkovic's spirit, the *cat* assumes the form of a smilodon and does its best to destroy them. This is a life and death situation with no quarter given or received. If the smilodon wins, it eats its owner for dinner and reverts to figurine form to await a better qualified group of allies. If the smilodon is defeated, the PCs must fight the angry ghost of Felkovic, who is no longer anchored to the figurine and is furious that his curse will not be fulfilled.

Felkovic's ghost: INT high; AL N; AC 0, MV 9; HD 10; hp 66; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg age 10-40 years; SA *fear, magic jar*; SD struck by only silver or magical weapons; vulnerable to spells only when caster is ethereal; SZ M; ML 18; XP 7,000; MM/130.

The *cat of Felkovic:* INT high (due to Felkovic's spirit); AL N; SA attacks harmful to vampires, *cat*'s presence within 20′ prevents vampires from assuming gaseous form; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; MR 100% to all destructive or harmful spells; ML 18.

The creature's specific cat forms have the following statistics:

Cat, wild: AC 5; MV 18; HD 1; hp 8; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1-2; SA rear claws rake for 1-2 hp each if both front paws hit; SD −3 to opponents' surprise rolls, surprised only on 1 or 2; SZ T (2′ long); MM/38.

Giant lynx: AC 6; MV 12; HD 2+2; hp 18; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1-2; SA rear claws rake for 1-3 hp each if both front paws hit, leap 15′; SD −6 to opponents' surprise rolls; SZ M (4½′ long); MM/36.

Panther: AC 6; MV 15; HD 3+2; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6; SA rear claws rake for 1-4 hp each if both front paws hit, spring 20′ up or 25′ forward; SD −3 to opponents' surprise rolls; SZ M (4½′ long); MM/36.

Jaguar: AC 6; MV 15; HD 4+1; hp 33; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-8; SA rear claws rake for 2-5 hp each if both front paws hit, leap 30′; SZ L (5′ long); MM/36.

Tiger: AC 6; MV 12; HD 5+5; hp 45; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 2-5/2-5/1-10; SA rear claws rake for 2-8 hp each if both front paws hit, leap 10′ up, spring 50′ forward; SD surprised only on 1; SZ L (7′ long); MM/36.

Spotted lion: AC 5/6; MV 12; HD 6+2; hp 50; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-12; SA rear claws rake for 2-8 hp each if both front paws hit, spring upward 15′ or ahead 20′; SZ L (6½′ long); MM/36.

Smilodon: AC 6; MV 12; HD 7+2; hp 58; THAC0 11 (bite), 13 (claws); #AT 3; Dmg 2-5/2-5/2-12; SA rear claws rake for 2-8 hp each if both front paws hit; SZ L (9′long); XP 1,400; MM/36.

Felkovic's spirit observes the PCs closely at all times. If they are evil or boorish, Felkovic allows the *cat* go through its natural growth pattern until, on the seventh day, it is large enough to eat its owner and kill the owner's companions (just like the orcs). Misplaying one's alignment in this adventure could have deadly consequences. On the other hand, if the PCs do anything to show that they are committed to act against von Kharkov, Felkovic's spirit reveals himself. At this time, the DM should read the sidebar "Felkovic's Spirit" below and run this event with the PCs.

At least three situations will trigger Felkovic's spirit to reveal himself, and there may be others:

—Taking action against the Black Leopards at the bridal lottery in Habelnik. (See "The Lottery.")

—Destroying Nadia, now a vampire. (See "Nadia's Visit.")

—Deducing that the baron is an evil being of some sort and undertaking an expedition against him.

After the PCs' encounter with Felkovic's spirit, their goal should be clear (and rather frightening): Go to the lair of the domain lord himself and defeat him, along with all of his minions.

While the above is a general outline of what may occur during this adventure, the DM can alter the course of events to suit the (notoriously unpredictable) PCs' decisions. Give the PCs every opportunity to show Felkovic's spirit that they are true heroes. If the PCs prove unworthy, the consequences are no less severe than losing to the baron.

As the PCs wander through the wilderness of Valachan, they may encounter various creatures, depending on the DM's desires. While random encounters will keep the PCs on their toes, such encounters may also detract from the excitement of the story. There is ample room for creativity in devising unique encounters, if the DM decides to use them. The RAVENLOFT setting boxed set provides guidelines for the types and frequencies of creatures in Valachan, but this information is not all inclusive. If the PCs are traveling aimlessly, the DM can include an encounter with two farmers rafting down a river. If the PCs are friendly, the farmers offer the PCs a ride on the raft and can provide enough information to get the adventure moving again.

Habelnik

If the PCs follow the *cat*'s mental push and go south, the party should pass through the town of Habelnik. Its buildings are all one or two story wooden constructions painted in drab colors. The only exception is a high tower on the northern edge of town. The center of town contains a grassy square with a community well. No walls or fortifications protect the town, as it is well secured by the Black Leopards and the townspeople's fear of the baron.

As the PCs enter town, they notice large banners hung across the streets: "Welcome to the Annual Bridal Lottery!". They also see posters tacked on fences, buildings, and trees. Each poster is the same and says:

> BE IT KNOWN, that I, Baron Urik von Kharkov, ruler of all Valachan, condemn the accursed giant cat haunting our fair land. This tawny, fanged beast is a killer of man, woman, child, and livestock, and must be killed lest we all perish! I offer 500 pantherheads and a lifetime exemption from the levy to any who can bring me the creature's head.
>
> Urik von Kharkov, Baron of Valachan

Except for the werepanther Black Leopards, the town's inhabitants are all human. The villagers stare with curiosity

Felkovic's Spirit

Whenever the PCs prove their heroic intentions to Felkovic's spirit, read or paraphrase the following to the players: [The PC who owns the *cat*] feels a familiar mental push. This time, however, the figurine does not transform into a cat. Instead, a swirl of mist spirals up from the little jade statue's mouth and slowly takes on a translucent humanoid form. The ghostly apparition speaks: (The DM may have to alter Felkovic's speech to fit the PCs' situation.)

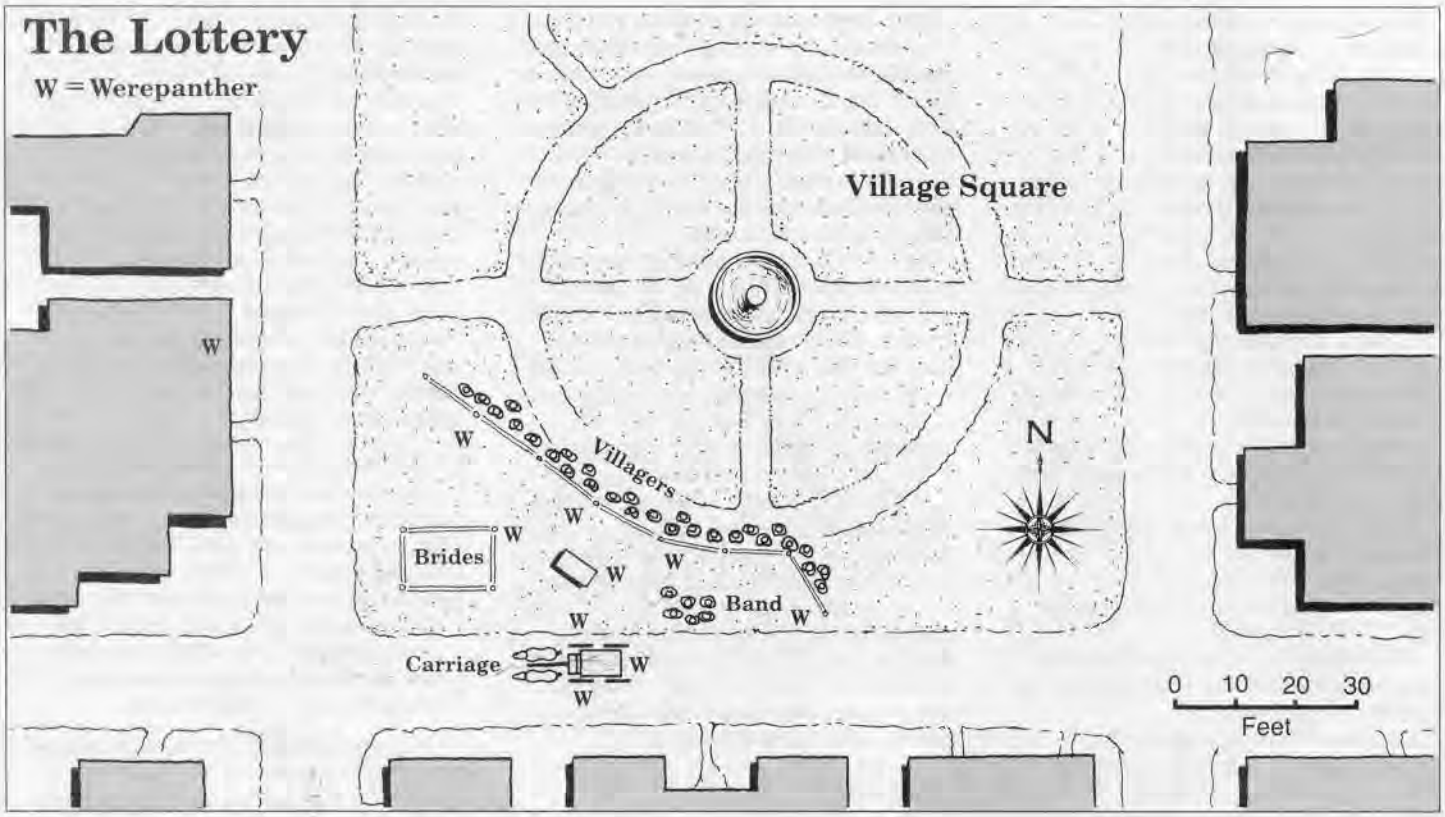
"Well done. You have shown me that you have the potential and desire to destroy the evil that infects this land. I am . . . I *was* Felkovic, a wizard of Habelnik. Years ago, the evil lord of this domain, Baron Urik von Kharkov, plotted to take my beloved wife, Nadia, as his own, and I used all my powers and wealth to create the magical figurine that you now possess. It was designed to destroy von Kharkov, but alas, just when I had completed it, the baron came upon me and ensorcelled me, distracting me from my purpose. He took me to Castle Pantara, where he and his pets ripped me to pieces and ate my remains.

"My spirit has remained within my creation, waiting many years for someone worthy to assist me in destroying this abomination. Now you have shown yourselves to be the ones I have longed for.

"I myself have no powers against the baron, but my cat does. Each day, simply throw it to the ground and utter the word "Longteeth," and it will assume the form of the great and ancient smilodon cat. But I caution you: the cat must be fed every day. When you confront von Kharkov, the smilodon will do its best to aid you in destroying the fiend who took my Nadia. I implore you to seek him out in his lair at Castle Pantara and bring peace to my spirit and this cursed land. If you do so, your greatest wish will come true."

The spirit will remain for a few minutes to answer the PCs' questions. (The DM should refer to "The Tale of Felkovic and His Cat.") Felkovic does *not* know that von Kharkov is a vampire, but he did see him shapechange into a panther. The wizard also does not remember the complicated procedure he used to make the *cat*. He will not say what will happen to make the PCs' greatest wish come true, because he has no ability to grant a *wish*, but he does not mind letting the PCs believe that he can do this. In response to PCs' questions on this subject, he reiterates, "I assure you that your greatest wish will come true once the evil one is destroyed." In fact, he assumes that their greatest wish is to become lords of a domain. Although this can happen, it will occur in a way that not even Felkovic's spirit suspects. (See "The Conjunction.")

Once the PCs have finished questioning Felkovic's spirit, the mist spirals down and returns to the figurine. The PC who owns the *cat* receives a mental impression of the direction and distance to Castle Pantara.



at PCs of other races but don't ask questions. ("Curiosity killed the cat" is a common Valachanese saying.) Even so, the townspeople appear contented, almost happy—until the sun sets, the mists roll in, and panther screams echo from the nearby forest.

The populace consists of zero-level humans whom the baron considers a herd of feed animals for himself and his vampire slaves. If approached in a friendly manner, an inhabitant may provide some useful information. Roll 1d10 or select a tidbit of information appropriate to the question. All information is basically true, as far as the villagers know.

1. This land is called Valachan and is ruled by Baron Urik von Kharkov. The land is bordered by mists, which make travel to other places difficult. A few times a year, traders from other lands appear to buy and sell various goods, but no one from Valachan ever travels very far from his home village.

2. Those who have seen the baron say he is a tall, handsome, dark-skinned man. He's a bit eccentric, though, and always wears gloves.

3. The baron's henchmen are called the Black Leopards. They are easily recognizable by their banded armor and the weapons they carry. To insult one of the Black Leopards or—heavens forbid—strike one means imprisonment forever in the baron's dungeons.

4. The baron runs a tidy little business in preserved vegetables. These delicacies are famous throughout the surrounding lands and are trade items particularly coveted by the Vistani gypsies. Every week during the growing season, the baron sends a buyer to town to purchase fresh vegetables.

5. The baron does not tax his people harshly, but he requires each town to provide workers for his castle. This is known as the "levy" and it is rotated among the three towns each month. Many of the workers who go on the levy come home quite pale, with a lingering illness known as white fever. Some workers do not return at all; they die from the fever in the castle. The high incidence of white fever must be due to pockets of bad air. (The obvious truth is that white fever is anemia resulting from vampiric draining.) A few workers catch a rare strain of white fever that causes not only paleness but also by ugly scars (one of the baron's vampire slaves is an elf vampire who drains Charisma).

6. In the past, several uprisings against the baron (based on rumors that he was some kind of monster) were ruthlessly suppressed by the baron and his henchmen. The last such uprising occurred over 10 years ago, and the surviving rebels were taken away by the Black Leopards and never seen again.

7. The baron has a difficult time keeping a wife because white fever usually kills each new bride within the year. Thus, each year, the baron selects a new wife. Due to the risk, this selection is often done by lottery, which is rotated among the towns. This year it is Habelnik's turn to conduct the lottery. Everyone hopes that the baron's new wife resist the fever so that the lotteries will end. Only inhabitants of the town may compete in the lottery.

8. Baron von Kharkov has offered a bounty of 500 pantherheads (each worth 2 gp) for the head of a large cat with huge fangs. This cat is described on many posters throughout town. The woods are full of black panthers, bears, and other beasts, so none of the townspeople have mustered the courage to go

look for the big-toothed cat.

9. A quarter of the population lives outside the cities, working as farmers and woodcutters. Life is harder for them, and many have been lost to white fever. These rustics are, however, exempt from the levy and the bridal lottery.

10. The baron lives in Castle Pantara, on a tall hill about 10 miles south, just off the main road to Rotwald. Those people who have returned from duty in the castle report that a large contingent of Black Leopards and other trusted servants live in and around the castle.

Most of the shops in towns sell products and services suited to an agricultural economy (great deals on plows, animal harnesses, and wagons). Adventuring equipment is in short supply, and weapons are not to be found, although pitchforks, axes, hoes, and other tools can be purchased for use as weapons. No magical items are available anywhere except in Felkovic's tower, and only limited clerical magic is available in the town's church.

If the PCs offer money from their world, the townspeople look at the coins strangely. The only coins that the Valachanese recognize are the gold pantherhead (about the size of a 50-cent piece, worth 2 gp), the electrum cateye (same size, worth 1 gp), and the copper claw (about the size of a quarter, worth 5 cp). There are no silver coins in the domain.

Habelnik has one small church, dedicated to a deity known as Yutow the Peacebringer, a god unique to Valachan. (The DM may substitute another good-aligned deity if desired.) The 3rd-level priest keeps a ready supply of *cure light wounds* spells for those in need. Strangers must pay two pantherheads per casting. Yutow's theology is based on obeying the law and the master of the land, keeping the peace, and bringing in a plentiful harvest. Baron von Kharkov finds this theology useful in controlling the populace, so he does not disturb the church. Several years ago, the then-current priest received the blessing of Yutow and learned the casting of several new spells. Unfortunately, he met with a horrible accident and his acolyte was installed in his place.

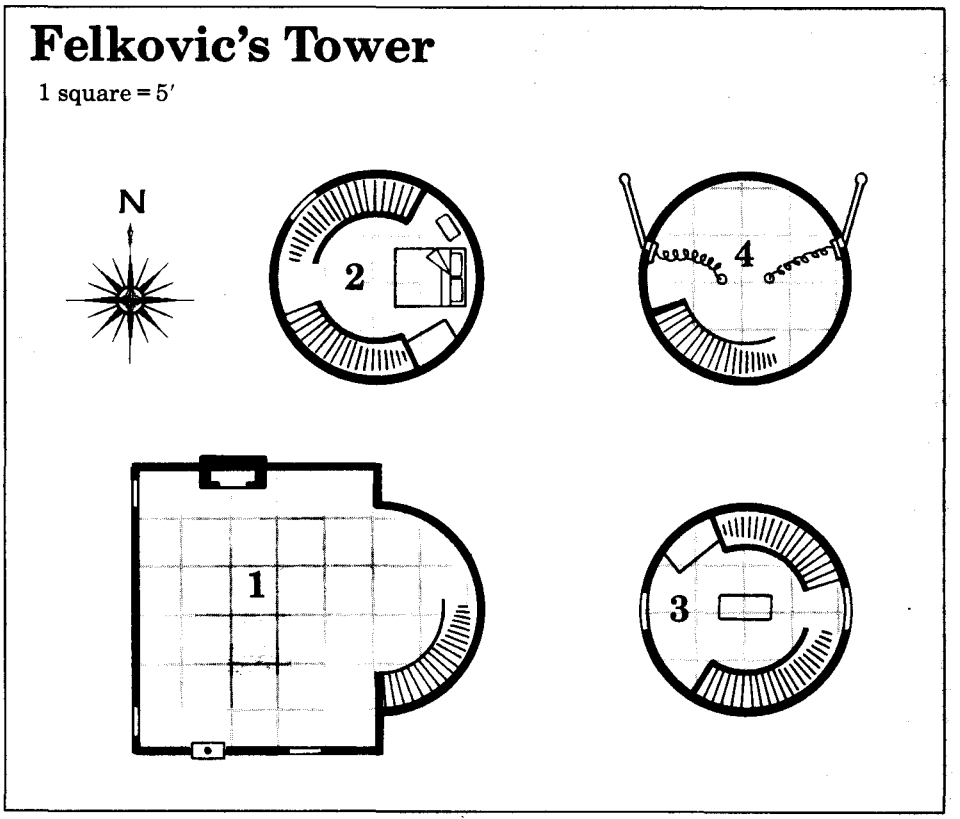
The DM should allow the PCs to roam Habelnik freely and meet the inhabitants. The innkeeper of The Crispy Pickle is anxious for customers and will gladly take the PCs in for one cateye per person per night. As they walk about the town, the PCs spot a Black Leopard henchman patrolling the streets. Everyone gives the Leopard a wide berth and a fearful glance. Seven of these thugs are stationed in town. (Their statistics are listed in "The Lottery" encounter.)

There are no random encounters in Habelnik. Occasionally, Felkovic's wife Nadia (now a vampire detailed in "Nadia's Visit") wanders into town for a snack, but this happens infrequently (5% chance per night).

Felkovic's Tower

Blackened window frames near the top of this 50'-high stone building are the only evidence of the destruction that occurred here. Any resident of Habelnik can tell the PCs that, years ago, the tower was the home of an easygoing wizard named Felkovic who was married to a beautiful young woman named Nadia. When his wife left him and went home to her mother in Rotwald, the wizard went crazy with grief. One stormy night he cast a thunderous spell that blew out all his windows and sent the neighbors fleeing for their lives. The baron himself came to investigate the disturbance and found the wizard so befuddled that he took him to Castle Pantara to rest and recover his sanity. Unfortunately, Felkovic caught white fever and died, and Nadia was never heard from again. It is said that she died too, grieving that she caused her husband's mental breakdown. The villagers insist that she roams Valachan as a ghost, looking for her husband.

This tale is quite different from what actually happened, a twisting of the truth through speculation and gossip planted by the Black Leopards. Nadia's occasional visits to Habelnik (she is the baron's nosferatu slave) lend credence to the tale that she is a ghost.



1. Main Floor. The only door to the tower is locked with a huge padlock and posted with a large sign that reads:

> BE IT KNOWN that I, Baron Urik von Kharkov, ruler of all Valachan, declare this place to be cursed and forbidden to all inhabitants and visitors to Valachan. Those who trespass upon this property will serve a penalty of two years' labor in Castle Pantara.
>
> Urik von Kharkov, Baron of Valachan

The padlock can be picked normally. Entering through the windows or climbing the tower walls avoids this trouble, but PCs who break windows or scale the walls have a 20% chance of attracting 2-4 Black Leopards. (See pages 57 and 70 for their statistics.)

Inside, dust and mildew coat the once-fine furniture and marble floor. The cooking area near the fireplace holds only hardened and rotted foodstuffs, unwashed crockery, and grime-encrusted pans. (Felkovic reverted to his bachelor habits after Nadia left for Rotwald.) Stairs wind up to the next level.

2. Bedroom. A large bed covered with fine furs dominates the room. On the night table, a wooden stand supports a milky glass globe, and the wardrobe is filled with robes and dresses. The globe and stand are enchanted; a touch on the base causes the globe to glow with *continual light.* Touching the base again turns the light off. Under the bed, a loose floorboard conceals the hiding place of Felkovic's spellbook. This book contains eight first-level spells, seven second-level spells (including *continual light*), five third-level spells, three fourth-level spells, two fifth-level spells, and the sixth-level spell *enchant an item.* The stairs continue up past scorched brick walls and blown-out windows.

3. Laboratory. Broken vials, bottles, jars, and tubing are scattered all over a large work table and spill off onto the floor. Metallic wires and clips hang from holes in the ceiling. A badly warped iron stand holds a book whose pages have been burned to a crisp. Bits and pieces of text can still be read, but the mystic symbols and runes are indecipherable. A *read magic* spell reveals only fragments of the original spells ("Next take the eye of a tiger . . .").

If the PCs open the closet door, the body of a tiger-striped cat falls out onto the laboratory floor. The cat appears to be quite dead, but closer examination reveals that the creature is warm to the touch and has a faint heartbeat. This is Boo, Felkovic's beloved pet, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the domestic cat form of the *cat of Felkovic.* If the figurine has assumed its living form and sees Boo's body, the *cat of Felkovic* yowls at the PCs as if it wants them to do something.

On the night that Felkovic created his artifact, he cast a *temporal stasis* spell from a scroll on Boo, then put her in the closet to protect her from the dangers associated with the cat figurine. If the PCs cast a *dispel magic* spell on the cat (against 18th-level magic), Boo will awaken. She tries to follow the *cat of Felkovic* whenever it animates, but the *cat* will never attack Boo no matter how large it becomes.

A PC who needs a familiar or a pet will find a loyal companion in Boo. However, von Kharkov can look through the eyes of any natural cat, and there is a 5% chance per hour (not cumulative) that he will look through Boo's eyes and see the PCs. Once the PCs take any action against the baron, this chance increases to 20% per hour. If the baron sees the PCs in this way, he continues his observation until directly threatened. Boo is unaware of the baron's power and cannot warn its master or the figurine of the spying.

4. Tower Top. PCs standing on the roof of the tower have a fine view of Habelnik and the surrounding area. Distant mountains to the north rise majestically from a base of clouds. Two holes have been bored into the floor of the tower. Wires coming up through the holes connect to two lightning rods bolted onto the tower walls. This equipment seems to have played some key role in Felkovic's experiments.

The Lottery

At 10:00 P.M. on the first night that the PCs are in Habelnik, the adventurers hear music and the murmuring of many voices. A parade winds through the streets of the town, led by two Black Leopards. A small band of gaily clad townspeople follows. Their horns, fiddles, and drums play a merry tune, but somehow the music just isn't right; there is just no fire or enthusiasm. Behind the musicians walk two dozen young women dressed in white gowns and wearing flowers in their hair. They don't seem overjoyed at being in this parade. In fact, they look rather tense and pale with their tightly pursed lips. The end of the procession is marked by two more Black Leopards, looking more like guards than celebrants.

Inquisitive PCs can follow the parade all the way through town, stopping wherever an unwed woman between the ages of 18 and 30 dwells. Eventually everyone ends up in the village square, where a lottery is held to select a bride for the baron. Although selection is a great honor, it is also a great risk since most brides do not live longer than a year. They always seem to die from white fever or a horrible accident. The villagers hope that one day the baron will find the right woman and break his streak of bad luck.

If the PCs observe the ceremony in the square, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

> All of the villagers seem to be gathered in the town square, where a black carriage is parked. Two of the baron's Black Leopard henchmen sit in the coachman's box, while another seven patrol the area. The young ladies are all collected in an area close to the coach. After the musicians finish their last song, one of the Black Leopards walks forward to a wooden stand that hold a black top hat turned upside down. He signals the crowd for quiet, then he announces:
>
> "Good people of Habelnik. This year your town is honored to provide a true and faithful baroness to the ruler of all Valachan. This woman will have the good fortune to share her life with our beloved liege lord, Urik von Kharkov. All hail his name!"
>
> The crowd roars back, "Hail von Kharkov, ruler of all Valachan!"
>
> The guard continues: "Know you that the names of all unmarried women have been placed into this hat of our good lord. And the fortunate lady, your next Baroness of Valachan, is"—a hush falls over the crowd as he pulls a slip of paper from the hat and reads it—"Maria Casalsa!"
>
> The maidens all scream and one of them faints, but she is quickly brought to her feet and escorted to the carriage as the band strikes up a stately march. The Black Leopard who pulled the lucky name leads the crowd in three cheers of "Hail Maria, Baroness of Valachan!" although the villagers' hearts don't seem quite in it. You notice that as Maria seems to be weeping as she steps into the carriage, but it is not clear whether she is weeping tears of joy or of sorrow.
>
> Just as the last cheer fades, an old woman hobbles forward and begs the closest Black Leopard to release Maria. She is answered by an open-handed blow that knocks her to the

ground. She struggles to her knees, grasps the guard's leg, and says something too faint to be heard. In reply, he draws a dagger and cracks her in the head with the pommel. As she slumps to the ground, he growls to the gasping crowd, "Be gone now! The lottery is over." With one final kick to the still body of the old woman, he mounts his horse and stares out over the crowd. The townspeople disperse quickly and quietly as the Black Leopards keep careful watch with their hands close to their weapons.

If the PCs try to intervene, three of the werepanther Black Leopards try to escape with the bride on the coach (two in the coachman's box and one hanging on the back). Six others fight to prevent the PCs from interfering. The tenth guard, in panther form, lies hidden on a nearby rooftop to observe everything by order of the baron. The baron himself lies in a trance in Castle Pantara, watching everything through his rooftop minion's eyes. If von Kharkov sees the PCs interfere with the lottery, the rooftop **werepanther** (38 hp) resumes human shape and shoots at the PCs with his heavy crossbow. The werepanthers on the coach are from the blockhouse at Castle Pantara; the other seven are permanently assigned to Habelnik.

Werepanther (10): INT very; AL LE; AC 2 [4]; MV 12 [15]; HD 5+1; hp 41, 39, 38, 37 (×3), 36 (×3), 33; THAC0 15; #AT 2 [3]; Dmg by weapon type [claw/claw/bite for 1-3/1-3/1-6]; SA shape change to panther [rear claws for 1-4/1-4]; [SD surprised only on a 1, struck only by silver or magical weapons]; SZ M; ML 14 (20 if von Kharkov is under attack); XP 975; new monster; *mace +1*, long knife. Statistics in brackets represent a werepanther's cat form.

If a werepanther is reduced to 15 hp or less in its human form, it will shapechange to panther form. Any PC who witnesses this change should make a horror check.

When the baron observes any party interference, he waits for five rounds to see if the werepanthers can take care of the PCs by themselves. He has the power to issue a mental command to anyone he has bitten, a group that includes more than half the population of Valachan. The baron's commands must be obeyed unless a saving throw vs. spell is made. If von Kharkov sees that the Black Leopards are going to be defeated, he issues mental commands to the inhabitants of Habelnik, ordering them to destroy the PCs.

At the end of the fifth round of battle with the werepanthers, or whenever the PCs seem about to defeat the baron's minions, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

In the midst of the battle, you notice that many of the townspeople have returned to the square. They all seem to be staring into the distance with a strange, glazed look. Those who have daggers have pulled them out. Others have found clubs, loose bricks, and stones. Still more townspeople come out of a store carrying axes and pitchforks. As they approach you, they smile crookedly and raise their weapons.

This is an excellent time for the PCs to retreat. Although the townspeople are all zero-level, a thousand of them converging on the PCs can be very dangerous. Townspeople not under the baron's control scream in terror and run away to hide in their homes with the doors securely bolted. No one will give the PCs sanctuary. If the PCs hole up in a building and prepare for a siege, the *charmed* mob will try to set the structure on fire and roast the PCs alive.

Killing lots of townspeople is not a good option for the PCs. The DM should emphasize the reactions of the villagers who are not *charmed*, so the PCs can deduce that the masses trying to kill them are just helpless pawns. There is a line between self-defense and wanton destruction, and PCs engaging in the latter should be required to roll one or more Ravenloft powers checks. The DM should emphasize up the scene's terror value but avoid a protracted battle between the PCs and poorly armed villagers. Any plan the PCs come up with to get out of town should be encouraged (but the townspeople throw a few bricks and stones at them as they leave).

If the PCs have diligently tried to rescue the bride or disrupt the lottery, the DM should go to the sidebar "Felkovic's Spirit" and take the PCs through that encounter when they have escaped the mob.

The PCs gain no special prize for rescuing Maria, because she is also

under von Kharkov's massive *charm* spell. She smiles gratefully, embraces the manliest PC carrying a dagger or short sword, unsheathes it, and tries to slip it between his ribs. Other PCs may make Intelligence checks to notice the attempt. If the check is successful, roll initiative to see if the PCs can stop Maria. On her first strike, Maria gets +8 to hit (the defender gets no Dexterity bonuses), and she inflicts triple damage if successful.

Maria Casalsa, human female: AL N; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level human; hp 5; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; I 9; ML 7.

Note: The PCs enter Valachan close to its northern border, so it is unlikely they will travel to the town of Rotwald, which lies south of Castle Pantara. If, however, the PCs travel to Rotwald while following up on the information that Nadia went home to live with her mother, the DM may want to move "The Lottery" to that town. The adventurers will not, however, find Felkovic's wife or her mother here. The Black Leopards took Nadia away secretly just before her mother's home burned down in a "tragic accident."

Nadia's Visit

Von Kharkov keeps four nosferatu slaves: Lady Adeline, an elf; Brother Homer, the baron's priest; Korby, the cook; and Nadia, Felkovic's wife. The first three stay in the castle, while Nadia roams throughout Valachan, keeping an eye on things for the baron. At night she sleeps in coffins scattered throughout the domain. Nadia secretly hates von Kharkov for separating her from her husband and taking her into the realm of the undead. At the same time, she is insanely jealous whenever the baron brings home a new bride, and is fearful that he will destroy her in favor of his newest love.

On the third night in Valachan, Nadia visits the PCs. When the party has turned in for the night, she assumes gaseous form, drifts over to the closest guard, resumes corporeal form, and attempts to *charm* him before draining. Even if the PC makes his save, he must still make a horror check once he sees Nadia's vampiric teeth.

If Nadia comes within 20′ of the *cat of Felkovic*, it sends frantic mental pushes to its owner, begging to be let out of its backpack or purse. The PCs who owns the *cat* must make a successful Constitution check (check once each round) in order to wake up. On the third round the *cat* changes form no matter where it is, clawing its way out of the backpack or chest and attacking Nadia. After the *cat*'s first attack, it backs off quickly; Felkovic's spirit is shocked when he recognizes this vampire as his wife. While the *cat* is within 20′ of Nadia, she cannot take gaseous form, but once attacked by a PC or the *cat*, she will defend herself. If she cannot *charm* a PC and convince him to defend her, she will shapechange into panther form. (Remember that on this night, the *cat* is also in panther form.) Because of the *cat*'s reluctance to attack Felkovic's wife, the PCs are on their own to destroy Nadia. Upon her true death, she reverts to human form, and whispers, "Destroy my master and free this land. Only bone can truly pierce his heart." Nadia discovered the baron's vulnerability to bone when she stabbed him with an ivory-handled dagger during one of their many quarrels. The metal blade was merely an annoyance, but when the bone handle entered the wound, von Kharkov went berserk and nearly destroyed her.

After the PCs have destroyed Nadia, the *cat* walks over, sniffs at the remains, and then goes off to yowl mournfully at the night sky for a solid hour. No one will be able to approach the *cat* during this time. When it has howled its grief in private, the *cat* returns to the PCs, and the DM may run the encounter with "Felkovic's Spirit" found in the sidebar on page 53, modifying the ghost's text to reflect his anguish at learning what happened to his beloved Nadia.

Nadia, nosferatu vampire: INT very; AL CE; AC 1; MV 12 (15 panther form); HD 8+3; hp 43; THAC0 13 (11 with weapon); #AT 1 (3 in panther form); Dmg by weapon type +4 (Strength bonus); 1-3/1-3/1-6 in panther form; SA rear claws 1-4 hp each if both front paws hit, *charm*, Constitution drain, *charm* previous victim; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M; ML 16; XP 2,000; MC15.

Castle Pantara

After their encounter with Felkovic's spirit, the PCs should head for Castle Pantara. Just before they get there, the DM should give them a break and allow one good rest period so the adventurers can regain spells and hit points. They'll need them.

The time of day when the PCs arrive at the castle will dictate which monsters are guarding the premises and what tactics they use. During the daytime, when the baron, Korby, and Brother Homer lie vulnerable in their coffins, the elf vampire Lady Adeline guards the castle walls. (Elf vampires are active only during the day. See MC10.) At night, the baron and his two nosferatu slaves keep the castle safe, although they do not patrol the walls or perimeter. (The baron believes it unthinkable that anyone would visit at night.) Several other monsters are active at all times within the castle.

Fifteen Black Leopards live in a blockhouse at the foot of the castle's hill; the Baron or Lady Adeline will summon these guards if the PCs pose a serious threat. Von Kharkov houses these Black Leopards in a separate structure because, in his paranoia, he does not want any more living creatures in the castle than necessary. The townspeople who live in the castle while on levy duty are quite enough. The blockhouse itself is a 30′ × 30′ two-story log building. The first floor is one large community room used for dining, cooking, and entertaining. Sleeping quarters take up the second floor.

Some of the Black Leopards stationed here may have been killed by the PCs at the lottery in Habelnik. The DM should adjust their numbers accordingly.

Werepanthers (15): hp 41, 39 (×2), 38, 37 (×6), 34, 33 (×3), 30; other statistics as in "The Lottery." Three of the werepanthers each carry a *mace +1*, another a *mace +2*.

Next to the blockhouse is a long one-story building that stables eight draft horses and three medium war horses beneath a loft that holds stores of oats and grain. Even though most animals do not get along with lycanthropes, these horses have gotten used to the werepanthers. Most stables are plagued with rodents, but there is nary a mouse dropping to be found here. If the *cat of Felkovic* is active and enters the stable, the horses scream in terror and do their best to kick open their stalls and stampede, possibly trampling the PCs in the process (for 5d4 hp damage).

The back room of the stable is a garage for three coaches and the carriage mentioned in "The Lottery." The coaches transport townspeople levied for castle duty.

Unless there are loud explosions, bright flashes, or some other extraordinary commotion from a battle near the blockhouse, nobody from the castle will notice what happens here. The werepanthers constantly quarrel among themselves, so the baron and his servants don't bother to investigate every time they have a fracas.

The following description assumes a daylight approach to the castle from the north. The DM should make any adjustments necessary to compensate for the PCs' direction of march:

> As you travel toward Castle Pantara, you feel as if something is watching you all the way. Your hair has a disturbing tendency to stand on end at the slightest sound, and your palms are sweaty. You get the distinct feeling that you are marching to your doom.
>
> From the only clear spot for miles, where trees do not block the view, you glimpse a stone keep built on a high hill. But this is much more than an ordinary keep; the castle is big enough to hold a small army easily. A steep path winds up the hill, leaving travelers exposed to missile fire from the ominous battlements. A wooden blockhouse and a long outbuilding stand among a grove of trees at the foot of the hill.

Two werepanthers patrol the castle perimeter and blockhouse at all times, but they are easily spotted. Each turn the PCs spend on the path going up to the castle, a roll of 1 on 1d8 indicates that the PCs can see the guards—and vice versa. It will take three turns to walk up the pathway to the castle. If the PCs climb the hill to scale a castle wall, it takes 12 turns of climbing to reach the castle, so the guards will be in sight for at least one turn. If the PCs attack the patrolling guards, one of the guards blows a whistle that calls the other Black Leopards to the scene within one turn.

Before the PCs reach the castle itself, the DM should determine locations for the vampires within. (See "Where Are the Vampires?" sidebar.)

Ground Floor

1. Walkway. A 10'-wide steep walkway winds up the hill to the looming presence of Castle Pantara. The walk is called the Tail because its position and landscaping relative to the castle make it look like a big cat's tail. The ground on either side of the walkway is very steep and often there is loose rock underfoot. Each turn that a PC goes off the walkway requires a Dexterity check to avoid a fall. (Falling PCs take 1-6 hp damage for each 10' fallen. The highest point of the walkway, where it enters the castle, looms 300' above ground level.) Scraggly bushes grow on the slopes below the Tail. For every 10' a PC falls, a successful combined Strength and Dexterity check (add the two scores together) on 3d20 indicates that the PC has grabbed a bush to halt the fall. PCs with mountaineering proficiency can avoid much of the danger of traveling the Tail, using ropes to prevent a long fall.

Lady Adeline, the elf vampire who patrols the castle walls, has an 80% chance to spot any PCs climbing the Tail during the day. If the PCs avoid the walkway by using mountaineering proficiency or a thief's climb-walls talent, her chance to spot them is reduced to 40%.

A daylight entry can be deadlier than one at night, because Lady Adeline will harass the PCs all the way into the castle and after their entry. As the PCs climb the walkway, she casts a *sticks to snakes* spell on prepositioned piles of wood, then peppers the PCs from the rear (negating Dexterity bonus to armor class) with bone-tipped arrows from arrow slits in the Rake (area 7). She moves from slit to slit for subsequent shots; if necessary she casts a *wall of thorns* spell to block escape attempts.

If the PCs escape the ambush area, Lady Adeline proceeds to the main audience chamber (area 10), and waits by an arrow slit to shoot at the party as it emerges from the gate house (area 3). Any PC who tries to take cover behind one of the trees in the courtyard (area 4) must contend with the four panthers in that area. If the PCs dispose of the panthers, Lady Adeline casts her *entangle* spell to snare some PCs, then shoots more bone-tipped arrows into their dangling bodies. Lady Adeline is not very nice but is a bit cocky, which is why she delays before summoning any werepanthers to her aid. If, however, she sees *cat of Felkovic* in smilodon form, she blows the hunting horn at her side to summon all werepanthers to the castle at once.

Once any PC gets close enough to melee, Adeline pulls back her veil to reveal her twisted, scarred visage. Anyone who gets a good look at her face must make a saving throw vs. paralysis.

Lady Adeline, elf vampire: INT genius; AL LE; AC 2 (−8 when shooting from an arrow slit); MV 15; HD 7+3; hp 45; THAC0 13; #AT by weapon type; Dmg by weapon type; SA +1 to attack rolls/+3 Dmg bonus in melee from 18/01 Strength, +5 to all missile-fire attack rolls (+4 for being undead and +1 for being an elf), +1 to attack rolls with long sword, Charisma drain in unarmed combat, twisted visage forces viewer to save vs. paralysis or stand paralyzed for 1-4 rounds after vampire has left (victim instantly dies on roll of natural 1), shapechange into wild eagle or giant eagle retaining her natural vampiric powers, immunities, and vulnerabilities (see below); SD +1 or better weapon to hit, regenerates 2 hp per round, unaffected by holy water; MR immune to mental attacks, half damage from magical fire and *cold* spells; SZ M; ML 16; XP 6,000; MC10.

Spells: *entangle, warp wood, snare, spike growth,* and *anti-animal shell* (each three times per day), *wall of thorns, sticks to snakes, giant insect*

Where Are the Vampires?

Daylight

Lady Adeline: Patrolling the walls (area 24).

Baron von Kharkov: If PCs have not been detected, roll d%. 1-65: Coffin in area 26. 66-00: Coffin in area 30. If PCs have been detected: 1-25: Coffin in area 30. 26-00: Coffin in area 32.

Korby, the cook: If PCs have not been detected, in coffin in area 17. If PCs have been detected, in coffin in area 30.

Brother Homer: If PCs have not been detected, in coffin in area 20 (under bed). If PCs have been detected, in coffin in area 30.

Night

Lady Adeline: Roll d%. 1-75: In coffin in area 21. 76-00: In spare coffin in area 9.

Baron von Kharkov: If PCs have not been detected, he is with his bride (area 27). Otherwise, he is looking for the PCs with every monster at his disposal.

Korby, the cook: See areas 8, 16, and 17.

Brother Homer: See areas 19, 20, and 22.

(each once per day), *transport via plants* ability, *pass without trace* and *invisibility to animals* at will.

Lady Adeline is armed with a *long bow +1* (+6 on attack rolls for missile attacks), 30 bone-tipped sheaf arrows, a *long sword +2*, and a *dagger +1*. In melee she fights with the long sword in one hand and dagger in the other.

Eagle, wild: MV 1, fly 30 (C); #AT 3; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1; other statistics as for Lady Adeline's elf vampire form.

Eagle, giant: MV 3, fly 48 (D); #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6/2-12; other statistics as for Lady Adeline's elf vampire form.

In contrast to this fierce daytime reception, no one guards the walls at night. Anyone foolish enough to enter Castle Pantara at night is welcome to the reception found there. Baron von Kharkov does, however, keep the main gate closed at night so that the smilodon cat he so greatly fears cannot enter.

2. Guard Tower. This small tower straddling the walkway to the castle is never occupied. A bas-relief of a panther head seems to glower at everyone who travels the path. Open entrances in the north and south walls of the tower are blocked by sturdy portculli. Inside, the tower is dirty and full of dead leaves. The simple winches that control the portculli are mounted high on the inside walls, just out of reach for humans.

A successful check for secret doors reveals a small loose stone in the wall to the west of the northern portcullis. The stone can be removed to uncover a handle that raises the portcullis with a horrendous moan and clanking of chains. During the day, the noise automatically alerts Lady Adeline, and it always doubles the chance of meeting the roving patrol of werepanthers. A similar but clearly visible lever on the south wall opens that side's portcullis.

PCs can use their bend bars/lift gates ability to get in, or they can avoid entering the tower by climbing over it. This works as long as the PCs move along the 3'-wide stone perimeter of the tower top and do not walk on the rotten flooring of the upper level. Placing more than 50 lbs. on the wood planks breaks the weak flooring and drops the offending creature to the bottom of the tower (2d6 hp damage).

The PCs may also walk around the tower. PCs walking around the west side must make two Dexterity checks or fall down the hill. The east side looks safer, but the baron has placed two camouflaged bear traps here to snare his smilodon cat nemesis if it snoops around. Each PC has a 90% chance of stepping into one of these traps unless he discovers them with a *find traps* or *find snares and pits* spell. The trap's unfortunate victim takes 1-8 hp damage, and his movement is halved until the PC has two full days of rest. To pry open a trap, no more than two of the victim's friends (but not the victim) must pull against the jaws with a combined Strength of 30.

3. Gate house. The last section of walkway passes under three winged panther statues that seem to eye the PCs suspiciously; they are finely crafted stone and nothing more. Beyond the statues, large black iron double doors are closed and locked (−20% to open-locks rolls); only Baron von Kharkov has the key. The lowered portcullis behind the door can be lifted with a bend bars/lift gates roll, and up to four PCs can combine their percentages. This portcullis also creaks and groans horribly when raised or lowered.

The inside of the gatehouse is bare, containing only the mechanism for working the portcullis and a ladder set into the east wall. The ceiling is pierced by several large slits, each about 12" long and 5" wide. No light comes from the slits, but soft sounds filter down from above. The DM should encourage the PCs to believe that someone may lurk above, ready to pour down burning oil or shoot deadly arrows into their midst.

The PCs can climb the ladder to the upper room of the gate house. The second floor is equally bare, except for a few pigeon feathers and droppings. Another ladder leads up through an opening in the ceiling. From the equally abandoned third floor, the PCs can climbing onto the uppermost walkway around the castle. An old ballista is mounted on the gate house roof, but it has not been maintained and is useless.

4. Courtyard. Alter the following description if the PCs enter at night and have no light source.

> The trampled dirt of this huge cobblestoned courtyard grows little but occasional tufts of yellow grass. A

few forlorn trees struggle for survival. Even in this season, their yellow, red, and brown leaves seem especially drab. A huge set of double doors directly to the north must lead into the massive keep. Smoke curls from the chimneys of a large two-story house tucked into a corner of the eastern castle wall.

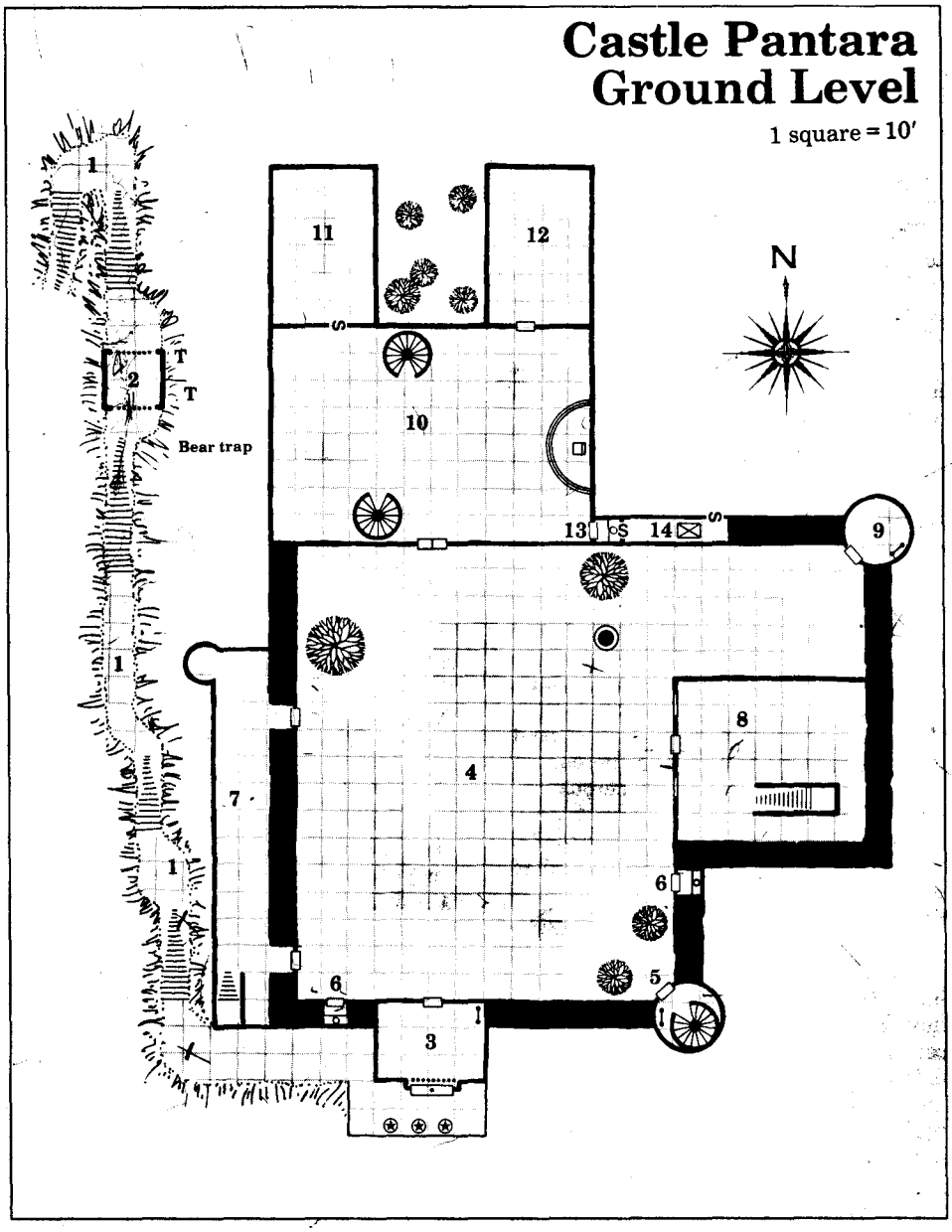
Four panthers hide in the trees at the southeast corner of the wall. When the PCs have moved 60′ from the gate house, the big cats jump down from their perches and attack. If PCs approach the trees, the panthers wait to pounce until they can drop almost directly onto the adventurers (−3 to PCs' surprise rolls). Any commotion here during the day alerts Lady Adeline. A night ruckus is ignored by the vampires, who attribute the disturbance to the panthers' evening activities.

Panthers (4): INT semi; AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 3+2; hp 26 each; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6; SA rear claws rake for 1-4 hp damage each if both front paws hit, −3 penalty on victim's surprise roll; SD surprised only on a 1; SZ M (4½′ long); ML 10; XP 420 each; MM/36 (Great Cat, Leopard).

5. Southeast Tower. The only thing inside this dusty room is a ladder affixed to the wall. The ladder leads to the upper tower levels, but there is nothing of interest up there. The spiral staircase in the middle of the floor leads down into darkness. Long ago, two playful panther cubs knocked the *cat of Felkovic* through the 2″ gap under the door. The statuette slid across the stone floor to the staircase and tumbled to the bottom (area 28), where von Kharkov later found it.

6. Latrines. These outhouses are dark and confining, with waste holes that go down 20′. Only the latrine just south of the manor house has been used recently (by the levies quartered in area 8).

7. The Rake. These barracks were constructed so that soldiers inside and on the walls could pepper intruders on the Tail with missiles, and that is just what Lady Adeline will do if she ambushes the PCs as they try to climb the walkway. Dust and cobwebs fill both floors of the barracks. The furniture is old but quite sturdy and looks unused.



If the PCs escape Adeline's ambush and look for her here, they find only her footprints in the dusty floor. The roof supports two old ballistae and one catapult, all in disrepair.

8. Manor House. The door to this structure is unlocked, and the following description should be read to the players once the PCs open it. The windows are so grimy that nothing can be seen inside. The description assumes a daylight entry and should be altered if the PCs visit at night.

As the door opens, you are nearly overwhelmed by the sharp, overpowering odor of vinegar and other spices. Several listless peasants chop vegetables, then pass the food to others who dump it into large heated vats. After stirring the contents with long-handled paddles for several minutes, the cooks scoop out the cooked vegetables and pack them into jars and barrels. The choppers put down their knives and shuffle over to pour an acrid liquid over the vegetables before sealing

them all up with wooden lids held down by heavy iron weights. All of the peasants move as if sleepwalking, and a few appear quite pale. When they see you, they cast their eyes to the floor and keep on working.

These people were levied from Rotwald to work in the castle, and they will be of little help to the PCs (all are zero-level humans). The townspeople think that the PCs are authorized visitors, as no one would dare visit the baron uninvited. The levies are restricted to the manor house and the area immediately around it (between the well and the latrine to the south) unless they have an escort. Once a week, one of the Black Leopards escorts the men (10 of the 15 levies) beyond the castle walls to chop wood. Occasionally, some of the levies are selected for special jobs during the day or night. The panthers in the courtyard ensure that the levies do not wander off.

All of the levies were *charmed* by von Kharkov when they first arrived. Although they are overworked and not paid for their services, they like the baron, whom they call a great and generous master. The levies do not see him except occasionally at night. They are not fond of Lady Adeline, whom they call "the veiled woman warrior." If the PCs examine these people closely, they can see small bite marks on the conscripts' necks, which the townspeople insist are insect bites. They admit that they all seem to have mild cases of white fever but are certain that they will recover. (The baron's priest, Brother Homer, told them so.) Two of the townspeople, however, lie on makeshift cots upstairs, quite ill with the fever, and all of the villagers are concerned about them.

The barrels and boxes stacked about the room are filled with pickled vegetables. The baron buys much of the year's crop from the peasants, then preserves the vegetables in brine and sells them back to the villagers for their own consumption or for resale to traders from other domains who come wandering through Valachan. The Vistani gypsies particularly relish these pickled foodstuffs.

The preparation area contains several cookbooks on canning and pickling processes, for which a master chef would pay as much as 5,000 gp. (Knowledge of food preservation secrets could be priceless in a land where famine might otherwise wipe out much of the population.) Several containers of vinegar and spices are piled in a corner.

The people levied from Rotwald have some information of value that may help the PCs figure out both the best time to strike against the baron and who (or what) guards the premises. Just after dawn each day, the villager who worked the hardest on the previous day is taken by "the veiled woman warrior" for a tour of the castle. Actually, this unfortunate person is taken to a tower room to satisfy Adeline's appetite. Being selected for this tour is not high on the villagers' wish list, since Lady Adeline has a haughty, intimidating bearing. They often draw straws to figure out who will be chosen. Alert PCs may notice that the villagers who have gone on this tour have scarred faces and show no initiative or other leadership potential. (Lady Adeline drains Charisma.)

Just after dusk, Korby the cook arrives to select two villagers to do some chores in the keep. One is selected to help clean the chapel (and be drained by Brother Homer), and another to clean the kitchen (and be drained by Korby). Three times a week, a third villager is chosen to shine the baron's boots and clean his quarters. On these evenings, the baron is giving his bride a rest from draining, and this honor falls on one of the peasants. Whoever is selected for this duty always comes back tired but remarks how wonderful it is to serve the lord and master of the domain.

On the second floor of this building, 15 cots are separated by hanging curtains. Only the area within 10′ of the fireplace on the east wall is warm. The smell of vinegar permeates this area as it does the floor below. Two cots are occupied by pale townspeople, levies who have been drained nearly dry by von Kharkov and his slaves.

9. Northeast Tower. A ladder secured on the inside, southeast wall goes up into darkness. There is nothing of interest on the ground floor, but the upper room houses a coffin. When the coffin is opened, *continual light* shines out from the inside of the lid. This is the spare coffin of Lady Adeline, and there is a 25% chance that she is resting in here during the evening hours. (See "Where Are the Vampires?" on page 59.) An door in the south wall of this upper room opens onto the castle walkway, and a ladder goes up through a trap door in the ceiling to the tower roof. The view north overlooks the blockhouse, stables, and main road.

10. Main Audience Chamber. Above the double doors in the courtyard, a remarkably well-carved panther statue crouches as if ready to spring. Its head detects as magical, but this is nothing more than a *Nystul's magical aura* spell (cast by a prior nosferatu slave who was a wizard) designed to delay intruders until they are noticed by the panthers in the courtyard. The doors are unlocked and swing both ways on their hinges, although they can be barred from the inside to resist an assault.

When the PCs enter the audience chamber, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You see a magnificent chamber with an elegantly winding staircase leading to upper floors. To the east, a raised dais supports an ebony chair carved like the open mouth of a panther. Black pelts line the chair and spill onto the dais. Only a few other chairs and benches are provided here. The chill of the room is only partially alleviated by the heavy tapestries that line the walls, tapestries skillfully woven with woodland scenes of predator cats running down helpless people.

As soon as anyone other than a vampire or werepanther (or someone escorted by one of these) enters, the secret door to area 11 opens and a mechanical golem resembling a large metal dog comes out to kill the trespassers. The baron commissioned the construction of this golem at enormous expense, reasoning that a big dog would be the best protection against a big cat. Von Kharkov named the golem Rowlf after its eerie, metallic bark.

The device is constructed of various metal cogs, wheels, armor plates, etc. Its oversized head is equipped with five broad, pointed metallic teeth in each jaw. These teeth are *daggers +1*, but their magic can't be detected unless someone inspects the head carefully after the golem has been defeated, because the entire construct is magical. When the golem moves, it makes a rickity-clickity-clackity sound, but it is far from fragile. If the *cat of Felkovic* is animate when the golem emerges, the mechanical device attacks it first.

The PCs may find Rowlf a formidable opponent and wish to flee the room. The

golem doesn't know how to open a closed door, and it moves at half speed going up stairs.

Rowlf (Ravenloft mechanical golem): INT non; AL N; AC −2; MV 12; HD 13; hp 75; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 10d4+10; SA electric shock for 6d6 hp damage on roll of natural 20 by golem or by opponent if opponent is using metal weapon (save vs. spell for half damage and save vs. paralysis to avoid incapacitation for 2d4 rounds), lightning aura of small bolts to all within 20′ for 3d6 hp damage (usable every other round, save vs. breath weapon for half damage, exposed items must save vs. lightning to avoid destruction); SZ M; ML 20; XP 15,000; MC10.

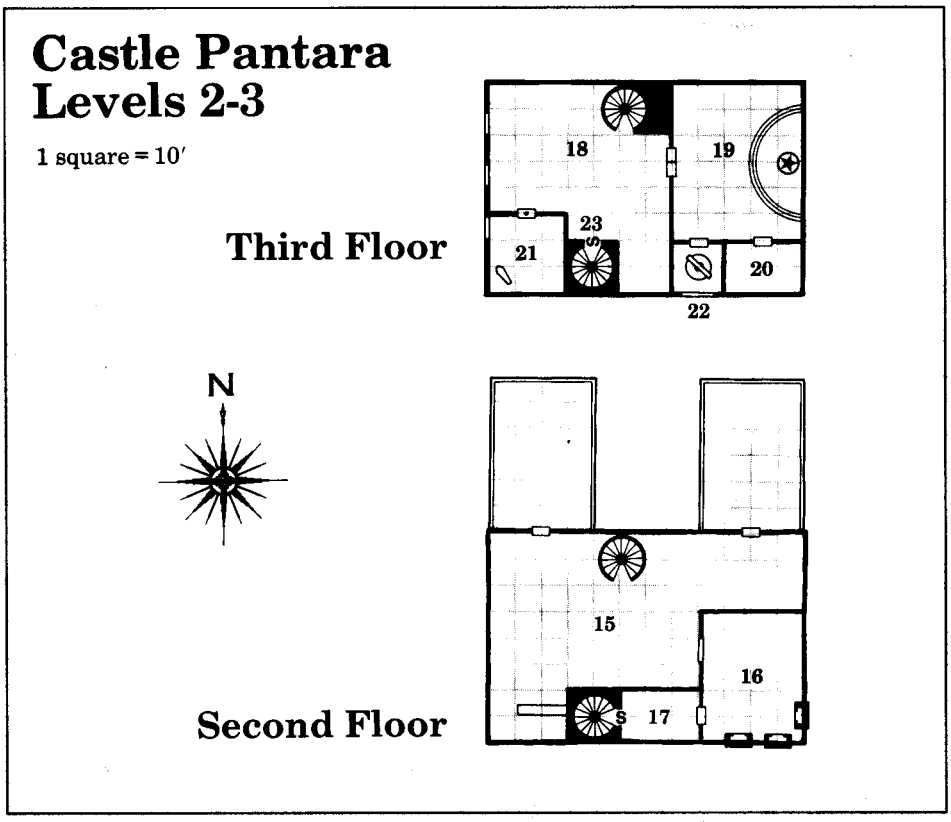
If Lady Adeline has retreated here, the PCs will have a difficult time closing for combat. If the PCs rush the door, she retreats partway up the stairs and waits for them to enter the room. When all her targets are clear, she fires away with her bow, concentrating on spellcasters. Of course, the PCs' entry will activate Rowlf, and the PCs will have their hands full with that monster.

11-12. Deserted Rooms. These rooms are unremarkable and very dusty. Rowlf, the mechanical golem, occupies area 11 when it is not activated. The room's arrow slits have been mortared up.

13. Latrine. This appears to be yet another outhouse like the others (area 6), but a secret door is located above the wooden toilet box on the east wall.

14. Secret Passage. This passage is shrouded with dust and cobwebs, although the small spiders that live here are quite harmless. Thirty feet down the corridor, a concealed pit trap waits to drop the unwary 20′ onto 10 rusty spears. Any weight over 50 lbs. triggers the trap. A victim must make a Dexterity check with a −2 penalty to grasp the side of the pit. Failure results in 2d6 hp falling damage and 1-6 hp spear damage (from each of 1-6 spears). A saving throw vs. poison is required for each spear strike to avoid a disease.

Beyond the trap, a secret door opens to the outside. If the Black Leopard guards come to the aid of the castle, they assume panther form and scramble up the hill to the secret door in a single round. One of them resumes human form to open it. Once over the pit, they all take human form to go through the secret door into the latrine, then disperse in the main hall to go wherever they are needed. Their keen hearing allows them to pinpoint battles quickly.



Second Floor

15. Banquet Hall. All the fine furniture here is covered with dust. Several long tables, dozens of chairs, and an enormous china cabinet stand ready for a roomful of guests—but none have been invited here in years. The cabinet contains enough utensils for 100 place settings. The utensils and china are of fine quality and may fetch as much as 1,200 gp. Frescoes on the wall show big cats feeding on freshly killed prey. Footprints in the dust of the floor travel between the kitchen (area 16) and the stairwell. Two doors in the north wall lead to outside verandas furnished with badly rusted black metal settees.

The bar in the southwest corner of the banquet hall is stocked with fine assorted liquors (value 1,000 gp). On the bar beside a jar of walnuts is a decorative wooden nutcracker carved in the shape of a toy soldier. Whenever anyone other than a nosferatu or werepanther enters, the nutcracker immediately animates and attacks. It is a doll golem that the paranoid Baron bought a few years ago from a band of wandering Vistani. When the golem animates, it takes on a horrid wide-eyed look and moves quickly to bite with its small but deadly teeth.

Doll golem: INT non; AL N; AC 4; MV 15; HD 10; hp 40; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 3d6; SA bitten victim must save vs. spell or laugh uncontrollably, damage increases by 1d4 hp per round until victim dies or a *dispel magic* spell is cast; SD immune to all magical attacks except *warp wood* (acts as a *slow* spell) and fire-based attacks (half damage); SZ T (1′ tall); ML 20; XP 7,000; MM/168.

An attack by the doll golem has a 70% chance of alerting the vampire cook, Korby, in area 16.

16. Kitchen. In contrast to the banquet hall, the kitchen is well maintained. Logs are neatly stacked in the twin fireplaces. The food preparation tables have been scrubbed clean, and an assortment of utensils, pots, and pans hangs neatly from hooks on the walls. The nosferatu slave, Korby, works here from dusk to midnight preparing supper and the next day's breakfast and lunch

for the townspeople who work in the castle. One of the townspeople from the manor house (area 8) always assists Korby each evening.

Korby is definitely not the dashing vampire type. The lack of hair on his head is balanced by the stained white beard that hangs down over his fat stomach. If confronted, Korby attacks with a carving knife (Dmg 1-4) in one hand and a butcher's cleaver (Dmg 1-6) in the other. The **kitchen helper** (AC 10; hp 4; 0-level human) grabs a poker (Dmg 1-3) and tries to help her good friend the cook.

Korby, nosferatu vampire: INT 14; AL NE; AC 1; MV 12; HD 8+3; hp 44; THAC0 13 (11 with weapon); #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type +4 (Strength bonus); SA *charm* gaze, shapechange to panther form, Constitution drain, *charm* previously bitten victim; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M (5'9" tall); ML 16; XP 2,000; MC15.

17. Cook's Quarters. This dark room is lined with shelves of dried foodstuffs, pickled vegetables of all types, and several spices—but no garlic. A plain wooden coffin stands beside a comfortable sofa in one corner of the room. The coffin is Korby's; the sofa provides a place for his evening helper to rest after kitchen duty. If the PCs wander in after midnight, Korby is here. There is a 35% chance they catch Korby in the act of draining his victim (a horror check is appropriate). If he is disturbed, Korby grabs an old mace from under the couch and attacks.

In the center of the west wall, a secret door leads opens onto a stairway that goes down to the dungeon level. Korby uses this route to take food to any prisoners being held down there.

Third Floor

18. Study & Library. An enormous library and study occupies most of this floor. The area is furnished with comfortable chairs and sofas, a work table, and many shelves of books. None of the books are magical. Many deal with cats of all sorts, but one book of particular interest is Baron von Kharkov's diary, which lies on the work table. If the PCs read this book, they can learn much about von Kharkov's background, his plot to take Nadia, his run-in with the *cat of Felkovic*, etc. (See "For the Dungeon Master" and "The Tale of Felkovic and his Cat.")

The shelves and floor of the library contain almost three dozen statues and figurines of every type of cat the PCs have ever seen (and some they have never seen before). The smallest of the figures is a 1"-high curio; the largest is a tailless brass manx standing 4' tall. Predators as well as domestic cats are represented in the collection.

It was on one of these shelves that von Kharkov placed the jade figurine that is the *cat of Felkovic* after finding it on the floor in area 28. None of the statues here are magical, and individually they have little value. But as a collection they could be sold for 950 gp due to their fine workmanship.

19. Chapel. This well-maintained place of worship contains highly polished pews and a large statue of a deity (any lawful-evil deity that the PCs would recognize). In front of the statue is a pulpit with a small slotted box. Even as a nosferatu, Brother Homer retains his clerical abilities and receives spells. Once a week, the town levies are brought to the chapel and Brother Homer preaches a sermon on the virtues of obeying the established power of the land. Any PC putting an offering in the coin box (or for that matter, stealing coins from the box) should make a Ravenloft Powers check. The box holds two gold pantherheads and three electrum cateyes.

If the PCs come here before midnight, they find a middle-aged village woman cleaning and polishing. Her name is Anna, and she politely asks the PCs their names and their business here. If the adventurers even hint at violence, she cries for help. There is a 15% chance that Brother Homer in area 20 will hear her.

Anna: AL NG; AC 10; MV 12; 0-level human; hp 4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (broom handle); ML 6.

Brother Homer, nosferatu vampire: INT highly; AL LE; AC 0; MV 12; HD 8+3; hp 51; THAC0 13 (8 with weapon); #AT 1; Dmg by spell, or by weapon type +4 (Strength bonus); SA *charm* gaze, shapechange to panther form, Constitution drain, *charm* previously bitten victim, spells as 9th-level priest with 18 Wisdom; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M (5'9" tall); ML 16; XP 2,000; MC15; *chain mail +1, hammer +3.*

Spells: *command, cure light wounds, curse, darkness* (×2), *protection from good; enthrall, heat metal, hold person* (×2), *silence 15' radius, wyvern watch; animate dead, cause blindness, dispel magic, prayer; free action, poison, sticks to snakes; flame strike.*

Before battling the PCs, Homer casts as many protective spells as he can (in order: *protection from good, prayer, free action*). If he has a chance, he casts *sticks to snakes* (on the mop and broom used by the villager). His main offensive spells are *hold person* (used on warriors) and *silence 15' radius* (to neutralize spellcasters). His *flame strike* spell is reserved for any hero who appears to be a paladin or good-aligned priest.

20. Cleric's Quarters.

> A luxurious bed, freestanding closet, small desk, and chair make up the furnishings of this room. A small replica of the statue in the chapel is surrounded by black candles. Hand-painted scenes of black panthers running down game and feasting on their kills provide macabre decor.

The bed frame sits high off the floor, allowing clearance for the secret trap door under it to open. The enclosed space below the floorboards holds Brother Homer's coffin. Homer rests here during the day, but if the castle has been alerted, he takes his rest in one of the coffins on the dungeon level (area 30). Between midnight and 2:00 A.M., the priest leisurely drains his current night's victim on the bed. PCs intruding on this scene certainly need to make a horror check.

21. Adeline's Quarters. Not only is the door to this room locked at all times, it is also barred from the inside at night. All that is in here is a coffin. The window in the west wall has iron bars.

If the PCs enter this room in the evening, they may (75% chance) find Lady Adeline resting in her coffin. (See "Where Are the Vampires?" on page 59.) A *continual light* spell has been cast on the inside of Adeline's coffin lid, permitting her to rest comfortably (darkness is harmful to a vampire elf). If she's not here, Lady Adeline rests in an identical coffin on the second floor of the northeast tower (area 9).

22. Bell Room. If Brother Homer encounters or detects the PCs, he will try to reach this room to ring the enormous bell that alerts every nosferatu and werepanther in the area. Once he

hears the bell, von Kharkov uses his *mass charm* ability on the 15 villagers in the manor house to command them to search for and destroy the intruders.

23. Secret Entrance. Von Kharkov visits the dungeon level through this secret door. It is absolutely dark in the stairwell; the PCs must have a light to avoid falling down the narrow, extremely steep stairs (for 3d6 falling damage). A bad odor permeates the area, and cobwebs are woven between the walls. (The spiders are harmless.)

Fourth Floor

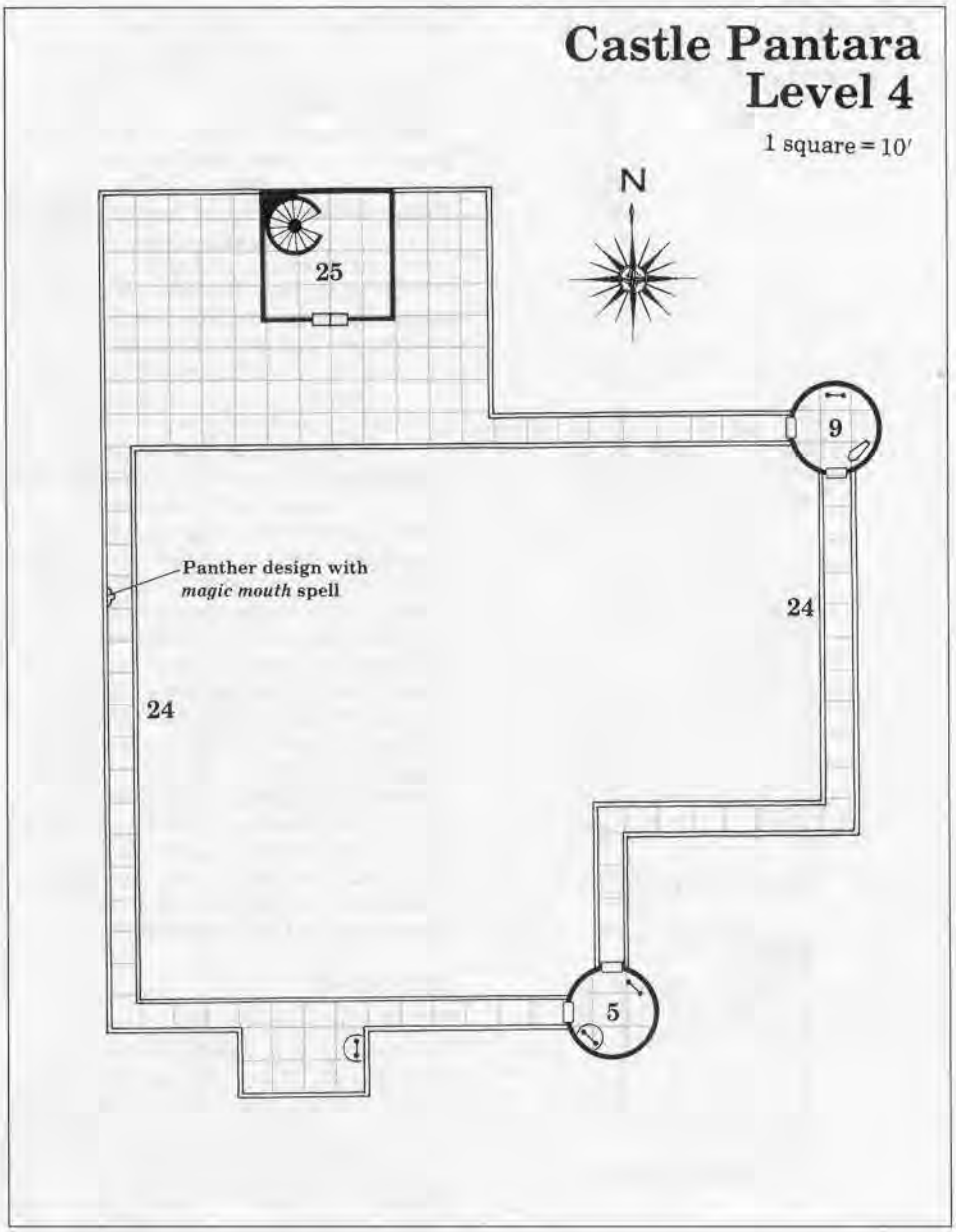
24. Walls. The crenelated walls of Castle Pantara provide good cover for anyone shooting missiles from the castle. The walkway around the perimeter is quite sturdy, but there are no walls around the inside. The interior of the walls is carved with fierce panther heads. One head on the west wall has a *magic mouth* spell on it, cast long ago by a wizard slave of von Kharkov. Whenever anyone other than a nosferatu or werepanther passes this carving it emits a shrill panther scream, with the same consequences as ringing the bell (area 22).

Anyone who falls or gets pushed off the wall takes 4d6 hp damage from the 40′ drop.

25. Guardian's Lair. The stairway entrance to this musty room has a powerful guardian: a 12′-tall giant skeleton created by Brother Homer as a gift for Von Kharkov. The baron rewarded Homer with two town levies all for himself. (These unfortunates died from white fever while returning to their homes.)

Von Kharkov placed this skeleton here to guard against intruders coming up the stairwell or through the doors from the ramparts. The skeleton will try to destroy any intruder. If the skeleton releases its *fireball* attack, everyone in Castle Pantara will be alerted by the low thumping noise of the explosion. The creaking bones and unholy fire that burns in the skeleton's rib cage certainly merit a horror check.

Giant skeleton: INT non; AL N; AC 4; MV 12; HD 4+4; hp 36; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-12 (bone-tipped spear); SA fireball once every hour for 8d6 hp damage; SD immune to normal and magical fire as well as *sleep, charm, hold,* and other mind-affecting spells, cold-based spells and edged or piercing weapons do half damage, missiles inflict only 1 hp damage, turned as a mummy; SZ L (12′ tall); ML 20; XP 975; MM/316.

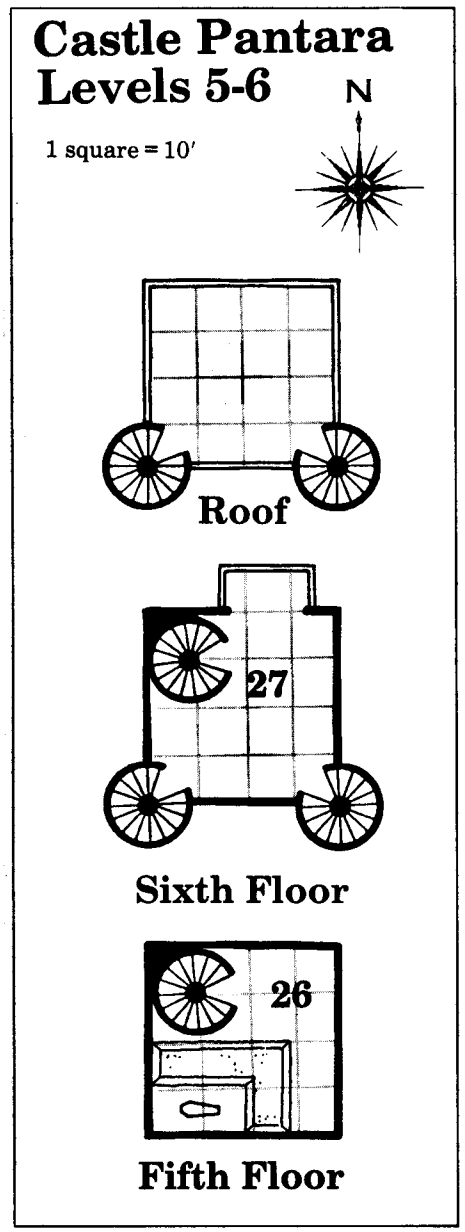


Fifth Floor

26. Von Kharkov's Room. Even before the PCs enter this room, they are assailed by an unbearable stench. Each PC who fails a saving throw vs. poison retches uncontrollably for two turns and cuts Strength in half for one hour.

A locked gate of iron bars blocks entry to this room from the stairwell. The PCs may get in by picking the lock or bending the bars, which are coated with a contact poison that causes paralysis for 12 hours (save vs. poison to avoid paralysis). A PC who examines the gate closely has a 90% chance to notice the oily substance that coats every surface.

This room's only furniture is a polished mahogany coffin in the southwest corner. Access to the coffin is blocked by a moatlike pit, 10′ wide and 10′ deep, filled with caltrops and poisonous snakes. Leaping the pit requires a running start and a successful Dexterity



check at −2. In addition to 1-6 hp falling damage, a clumsy PC will land on 0-5 caltrops, suffering 1-4 hp additional damage per caltrop, and must make a save vs. paralyzation to avoid being lamed. (See the *Complete Thief's Handbook,* page 99.) A lamed PC can move at only one-third normal Movement Rate for 24 hours or until magically healed. To add injury to insult, 5-10 angry poisonous snakes attack the PC on the first round and 5-10 more attack each subsequent round, up to a limit of 40.

Poisonous snakes (40): INT animal; AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 2+1; hp 11 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SA poison (save vs. poison or take 3-12 hp damage in 1-6 rounds); SZ S; ML 8; XP 175 each; MM/320.

See the sidebar "Where Are the Vampires?" to whether von Kharkov is resting here in his coffin. Even if it is daylight outside and he is asleep, the baron will be instantly aware of trespassers in his room and will mentally call for assistance from his nosferatu slaves, the werepanthers from the blockhouse, and even the town levies. PCs who open von Kharkov's coffin find themselves staring into his wide-open eyes as he tries to *charm* one of them. If the *cat of Felkovic* is with the PCs in its living form, it roars out a challenge and attempts to tear the baron to pieces. Von Kharkov will use the power of his *charm* over a PC to suggest the adventurer stop the big cat from killing him.

If the *cat* has been destroyed (or the PCs never found it), they can destroy the baron by impaling him with a bone stake. (One of Lady Adeline's bone arrows or the giant skeleton's spear will do nicely.) The PCs must then remove his head and fill his mouth with holy wafers. The traditional wooden stake will only break, leaving the baron smiling widely to expose his fangs. Both horror and fear checks are appropriate, especially if the players moan and groan loudly at this development.

Sixth Floor

27. Bride's Room. The stairwell to this room ends in a cagelike door similar to the one in area 25, and is coated with the same poison. If the PCs rescued Maria from "The Lottery," this room is unoccupied and the text pertaining to the bride may be omitted.

> A beautiful, pale young woman dressed in a flimsy nightgown lies atop a luxurious fur-laden bed. She appears to be sleeping soundly. Her hands are manacled together and connected to a long chain fastened to a ring set in the center of the floor. On the walls, paintings show male and female panthers hunting together, sleeping contentedly in the branches of a tree, and raising their cubs.

The young woman is **Maria Casalsa** (see "The Lottery" for her statistics), the baron's chosen bride, and she is hopelessly *charmed.* She sincerely believes that she and the baron are madly in love. He visits her at night and enjoys an evening of marital bliss by slowly draining her of several Constitution points. When she is close to death, von Kharkov allows her to recover for a day or two and then resumes his visits. Eventually, he won't be able to control himself and will drain her totally.

Maria does not want to be rescued and screams loudly for help if she gets the idea that the PCs are foes of her paramour. In the evening this attracts von Kharkov himself, but he will promptly flee to gather reinforcements once he sees the *cat.* If it is daylight, Lady Adeline will come to investigate the problem. The elf vampire assumes her giant eagle form to fly to the room's outside porch, resuming her normal form to engage the PCs in mortal combat.

The PCs may try to reason with Maria by pointing out the obvious, that she is imprisoned with chains, but the bride smiles sweetly and explains that the baron has chained her up out of love, to prevent her from accidentally falling to her death from the porch outside her room. (Actually, the baron does not want her to jump.) The chain is secure enough to hold the weakened bride but may be broken by a successful bend bars roll with a 10% bonus. It is long enough (30') for all PCs to combine their Strength scores in an attempt to break it.

The furs on the bed are of high quality and variety (fox, marten, badger, and mink) and are worth a total of 1,250 gp. A chest of drawers holds 10 sets of silk sheets and pillowcases, all of fine quality. They are worth 55 gp total.

Dungeon Level

28. Stairwell Bottom. The stairs from area 5 descend 25' to this level. The floor here is grimy stone. After Felkovic's demise in the courtyard, the small cat figurine was swatted by some panther cubs into area 5; it tumbled down the stairwell and wound up here, where von Kharkov eventually found it.

29. Cell Block. When the PCs open the door to this area, they are struck by the combined odors of human waste, body odor, and death. Failure to save vs. poison results in each PC retching for one turn and suffering a −1 penalty to all rolls while in this area and for two turns after leaving it.

The long hallway contains nine identi-

cal iron doors. Each door has a small barred window at eye level and an open slot near the floor through which the prisoner inside was fed. Each cell has an iron bed, straw ticking, and a chamber pot.

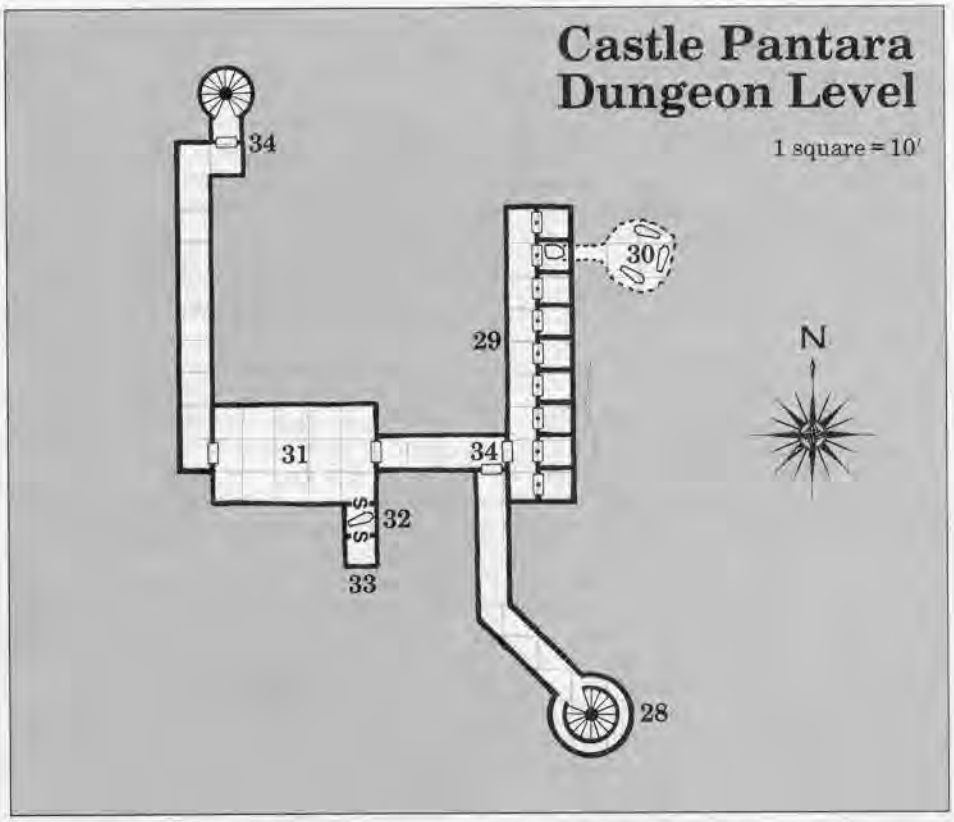
If the PCs killed any werepanthers in Habelnik, the baron will have taken a like number of levies from the manor house, bitten them to cause lycanthropy, and imprisoned them here. On the next new moon, they will become werepanthers and be released to serve the baron. The cell leading to area 30 is always empty; under the bunk, a secret panel gives access to a crawlspace.

30. Secret Coffins. The crawlspace below the cell is 3' in diameter. Five feet beyond the east cell wall it drops 15' straight down (1-6 hp damage if a PC falls) to a pit containing three spare coffins. If the PCs have been detected prowling in the castle, both Korby and Brother Homer rest here during the day and von Kharkov may rest here as well. (See "Where Are the Vampires?" sidebar and area 26.) Nosferatu caught resting down here are essentially helpless except for their *charm* abilities and von Kharkov's ability to summon all werepanthers and levies to his aid.

31. Torture Chamber. Von Kharkov's early reputation for extraordinary cruelty has not diminished, as evidenced by this grisly chamber. The room is stocked with every possible instrument of torture, and the floor is stained with blood. Each device has some catlike feature in its design. For example, the interrogation chair (a chair with spikes on the seat, back, arm rests, and leg rests) is shaped like a large black cat. The thumbscrew is fashioned like a black cat's head. The head crusher appears to be a gigantic black paw. Braziers for the branding irons have cat-leg tripods.

32. Secret Coffin Room. If the PCs are detected in the castle, there is a 75% chance that von Kharkov rests in this coffin during the day. (See "Where Are the Vampires?" sidebar.) For the baron's reaction to intruders, see area 26.

33. Treasure Room. Von Kharkov keeps his magnificent treasure hoard in this chamber. Several chests contain coins in the amount of 3,000 pantherheads, 5,000 cateyes, and 10,000 claws. There are also 10 pieces of jewelry (values 1,000 gp (×5), 800 gp (×4), 650 gp), and 14 gems (values 3,000 gp, 1,500 gp (×4), 300 (×9)).



One of the gems is a perfectly round tigereye, a special type of *ioun stone.* When thrown into the air, the tigereye spins about and *polymorphs* its owner into a tiger for up to three hours. The stone functions once a week. If the stone is used again before seven days have passed, it crumbles into dust and its owner is permanently *polymorphed* into tiger form.

The chests also contain three potions (of *healing, gaseous form,* and *treasure finding*), a *shield +1,* a *spear +1,* a *ring of free action,* and a *wand of fire* (20 charges). At the bottom of one chest, the PCs can find a special *bag of cats.* This item works like a *bag of tricks* (see the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*), but the animal grabbed is always some type of cat (roll 1d12):

1. domestic cat
2. bobcat
3. ocelot
4. leopard
5. werepanther in panther form
6. jaguar
7. ocelot
8. cheetah
9. giant lynx
10. tiger
11. weretiger in tiger form
12. spotted lion

A werepanther or weretiger will immediately run off to wreak havoc in the closest civilized area. All other cats pulled from the bag will aid their summoner for three turns. A total of nine cats can be pulled from the bag.

34. Alarm Doors. Fixed on the hall side of this door are strips of leather with hundreds of bells. Unless the door is silenced before it is opened, a loud jangling noise echoes down the hallway. Any of the nosferatu resting on this level are immediately alerted. If von Kharkov hears the bells, he mentally commands the werepanthers and the town levies to come to his aid. They arrive in 10 rounds. Lady Adeline will not respond to the alarm because she takes damage every round she is underground.

Defeating the Baron

Sooner or later, the PCs should catch up with Baron von Kharkov. Where and

how this happens will vary depending on the PCs' actions. If the adventurers catch von Kharkov while he is resting in a coffin, see area 25 for his reactions. If the baron spots the *cat of Felkovic* and can get away, he flees howling for help, preferably through areas with monsters that will delay PCs' pursuit. He immediately summons all werepanthers, the panthers from the courtyard, the other nosferatu, and the town levies to protect him. If he has time, von Kharkov makes his way down to area 33, where he dons his *ring of free action* and grabs the *shield +1* and *spear +1*.

If the battle is inconclusive but the baron wounded several PCs, von Kharkov's fear of the *cat* will make him cautious, expecting his lycanthropic touch to do his work for him. Although the new moon is only seven days away, the PCs will not expect to become were-creatures from the touch of a vampire. When they sprout fangs and claws, their companions will certainly be motivated to complete the adventure!

If the baron did not wound the PCs, he will use his forces to track down the PCs and attack relentlessly, using all his spells and other abilities. He will throw his forces into desperate attacks against the *cat* in a desperate fight with no thought of surrender. Once the *cat* attacks the baron, von Kharkov uses the *long sword +1, +2 vs. enchanted creatures* that he keeps by his side. When he reaches 10 hp or less, he lets out a horrible scream and fights with an additional +1 to hit due to his frenzied fear that he cannot escape through gaseous form. The DM should strive to make the baron's end climactic.

Baron Urik von Kharkov (nosferatu vampire): INT genius; AL LE; AC 1 (−1 with *shield +1*); MV 12; HD 10+2; hp 50; THAC0 11 (8); #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1-3/1-3 or by weapon type +6 (Strength bonus 18/00); SA lycanthropy, Constitution drain, shapechange to panther form or gaseous form at will, *charms* with −3 penalty to victim, gaze attack works as *forget* spell for three prior rounds, summon 1d4+1 panthers to serve him, summon any prior victims to do his bidding anywhere within Valachan; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, regenerates 3 hp per turn (except damage from the *cat of Felkovic*), immune to *sleep, charm, hold* spells, immune to poison and paralysis, half damage from cold- and electricity-based spells; MR 10%; SZ M; ML 16; RR1.

Von Kharkov's panther form: AC 6; MV 18; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6; SA rear claws for 1d6+1/1d6+1; SD surprised only on a 1, leap up to 30′ in the air; RR1.

Once von Kharkov is destroyed, several things happen. All werepanthers immediately revert to zero-level humans wherever they are (were-PCs assume their normal levels), and the lycanthropy that is progressing in any dungeon prisoners stops (see area 29). When the baron is destroyed, the curse of his bite is immediately eliminated. Town levies in the castle likewise come out of their trance and stop their attacks. Finally, the destruction of a domain lord causes a major rift in the demiplane, and all vampire slaves immediately crumble into dust. The *cat* reverts to statuette form, and Felkovic's spirit emerges again as a semitransparent humanoid. It speaks:

> "Well done, my friends. I cannot thank you enough for helping me fulfill my curse against this fiend. The years' weight is now gone. Nadia is avenged! I now give you your greatest wish: The land is yours. Lead the people of Valachan into a new world where darkness is not feared and happiness is not fleeting. Thank you and farewell."

The figure dissipates into the night air and is gone, and the PCs may hear what sounds like a sigh of relief (or was it the wind?).

The Conjunction

As Felkovic's spirit departs, the entire land of Valachan becomes deathly quiet for 10 minutes. There is no noise at all: no wind through the trees, no birds singing or crickets chirping, no yowls of black panthers. The air seems heavy and thick, and clouds gather along the horizon. Suddenly, the land is rocked by tremors, and violent thunderstorms rush in with heavy rain and lighting. Even through the thick clouds, the PCs see streaks of light in the sky, multicolored meteors flying in all directions. This chaos goes on for three hours and no one can rest. If the PCs look down from the castle, they see forest animals running wildly about. The town levies and former Black Leopards roll on the ground, moaning and groaning with their eyes rolled back. If the PCs are watching, they also see the remains of von Kharkov fade and disappear.

This conjunction is a rare event, in which a domain of Ravenloft replaces a portion of land in another realm. (See the RAVENLOFT boxed set, *Realm of Terror* book). When it is all over, Valachan (along with the PCs) is wherever the DM wants to put it. The DM can use this device to return the PCs to their own world, or place them somewhere else.

Concluding the Adventure

Eventually the towns of Valachan send emissaries to Castle Pantara to find out what happened. They hail the PCs as heroes and acknowledge them as the leaders of Valachan. Leadership will certainly be needed if the land has been transplanted to an area with distrustful neighbors who may not appreciate several thousand strangers appearing out of nowhere.

Follow-up adventures may be necessary to clean up the various evils left over in Valachan. Ghosts wander the wilderness, the maddened spirits of the rebels who were killed painfully by von Kharkov and the werepanthers. Several RAVENLOFT sourcebooks mention other evil beings that live in this land.

Like all good villains, Von Kharkov himself might return once the PCs have relaxed in their new realm. What happened to his remains? Is he lurking about in some dormant form, only to reappear later? If he seeks vengeance, what form will it take?

And what of the *cat of Felkovic*? After the wizard's spirit leaves the figurine, much of its magic is gone, but it still functions like a *figurine of wondrous power.* When the command word is spoken, it becomes a *jade battlecat* (with AC 4 and all the statistics of a smilodon). It will serve once a day for up to three hours, and it must be fed (preferably pork, well done).

Paul Culotta and his family recently moved to Tacoma, Washington. "Felkovic's Cat" was one of Paul's first submissions to DUNGEON® Adventures, and has had about as many lives as its namesake. Paul would like to dedicate this adventure to his wife, Shari. Ω

Werepanther

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Hilly/forested
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Pride
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Very
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING:	Varies by location
ARMOR CLASS:	2 (4)
MOVEMENT:	12 (15)
HIT DICE:	5+1
THAC0:	15
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (3)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon type (1-3/1-3/1-6)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Shapeshift (rear claws 2-7/2-7)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Silver or magical weapon to hit; (surprised only on a 1)
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5′-6½′ tall in human form, or large predatory cat)
MORALE:	14; 20 defending von Kharkov
XP VALUE:	975

Werepanthers are unique to Valachan. They are the elite guards and enforcers of Baron Urik von Kharkov, the nosferatu vampire lord of that domain. The statistics in parentheses represent creature's panther form.

While many vampires have human henchmen to guard their resting places, von Kharkov has created these monsters to do his bidding. The baron, unlike other nosferatu vampires, was once a panther and can assume panther form. When so transformed, his panther bite infects the victim with an unusual lycanthropy. On the next new moon, the victim goes through horrible convulsions as the disease takes its full course. His face and body change so much that former associates do not recognize him, and his skin darkens to an umber hue. Furthermore, he grows stronger and more agile (S 17, D 16, unless scores are already better than this). After three hours of convulsions, the process is complete. The victim can now shapechange into panther form at will, his alignment has changed to lawful evil, and he is permanently *charmed* by the baron. Only silver or magical weapons can harm a werepanther.

The werepanthers are easy to pick out from the rest of the population. There are other dark skinned people in Valachan, but the werepanthers are the only ones who wear banded armor and carry cruel, unique weapons of war. Each carries a heavy black mace with the blunt end fashioned like a panther's paw; this weapon is referred to fearfully by the Valachanese as "the baron's arm." It is a *mace +1* and does 3-10 hp damage (including the werepanther's +1 Strength bonus). The other two weapons are a long, thick, black-bladed knife (Dmg 1-5/2-7) and a short whip of black leather strips tipped with sharp, cruel pieces of metal. When the whip hits a victim in the face (on a natural 20), it has a 70% chance of leaving a permanent scar (−1 to Charisma) and a 10% chance of blinding one eye. Werepanthers are also proficient with heavy crossbows but are rarely seen walking around with them. In melee combat, they use the mace in one hand and the knife in the other. The whip is used to discipline the populace.

Seven werepanthers are stationed in Rotwald and the same number in Habelnik. Fifteen werepanthers reside in the blockhouse at the base of Castle Pantara. Those stationed in the towns are grimly ominous sheriffs who roam the streets maintaining the baron's will. Those at Castle Pantara keep an eye on the premises, capture escaping townspeople, and go among the towns enforcing monthly levies and the baron's annual bridal lottery. If there is an outbreak of trouble, they reinforce the werepanthers assigned to each town.

The townspeople are not allowed to possess weapons other than a dagger or club, so the Black Leopards (as they are fearfully referred to by the populace) are practically invincible. When the last uprising occurred many years ago, the rebels were quickly overcome by the werepanthers and taken to the woods, where they suffered a lingering, painful end. To this day, people still whisper about what really happened to those who rebelled, and mothers discipline unruly children by threatening to turn them over to a Black Leopard.

The Black Leopards maintain a quiet, stern visage when patrolling the streets of the towns or operating outside Castle Pantara. They exude an aura of unapproachability that is not magical but a result of their body language. Everyone gives them a wide berth.

The werepanthers' Achilles' heel is the powerful nosferatu lord who created them. If von Kharkov should ever be destroyed, the werepanthers in Valachan will suddenly collapse and go into convulsions as the mystical bond to their creator is severed. When the convulsions end, they revert to being the persons they were before, but they suffer nightmares and flashbacks to their werepanther days for several years.

Continued from page 13

Concluding the Adventure

In addition to the experience points the PCs receive for destroying Vindr's undead spirit, they also gain the gratitude of Captain Segel and his crew for ending the *Vaka*'s curse (provided the PCs can prove that there was an undead spirit in the figurehead). Captain Segel refunds the PCs' fare for passage and assures the adventurers that he and his crew are doughty seamen, not faint of heart in the least, and willing to help the PCs in the future. The PCs should also split a 3,000-XP story bonus if they permanently destroy Vindr.

As a further adventure, the PCs could investigate Vindr's murder. The faint marking on the moneybag (area 17) provides a cryptic clue to follow. If the PCs decide that Vindr was murdered and want to know why, the faint trail eventually leads back to Rhet Corsuhn and Corsuhn Shipyards. An *augury* cast about the leather pouch, for example, might reveal another cryptic clue, such as "A frozen soul/He cold gold stole/ Killed for his deed/As they agreed." This should be enough to indicate that Vindr was murdered.

The PCs should not meet Rhet Corsuhn during the course of this adventure. The DM should feel free to develop Rhet in a way that suits the campaign. Rhet is a master shipbuilder with a large business based in L'Trel. In addition to being a thoroughly hedonistic playboy and lout, Rhet has many contacts and friends among the seedy elements of L'Trellian society. Rhet is noted for his ruthless personality (which extends to his business practices). Ω

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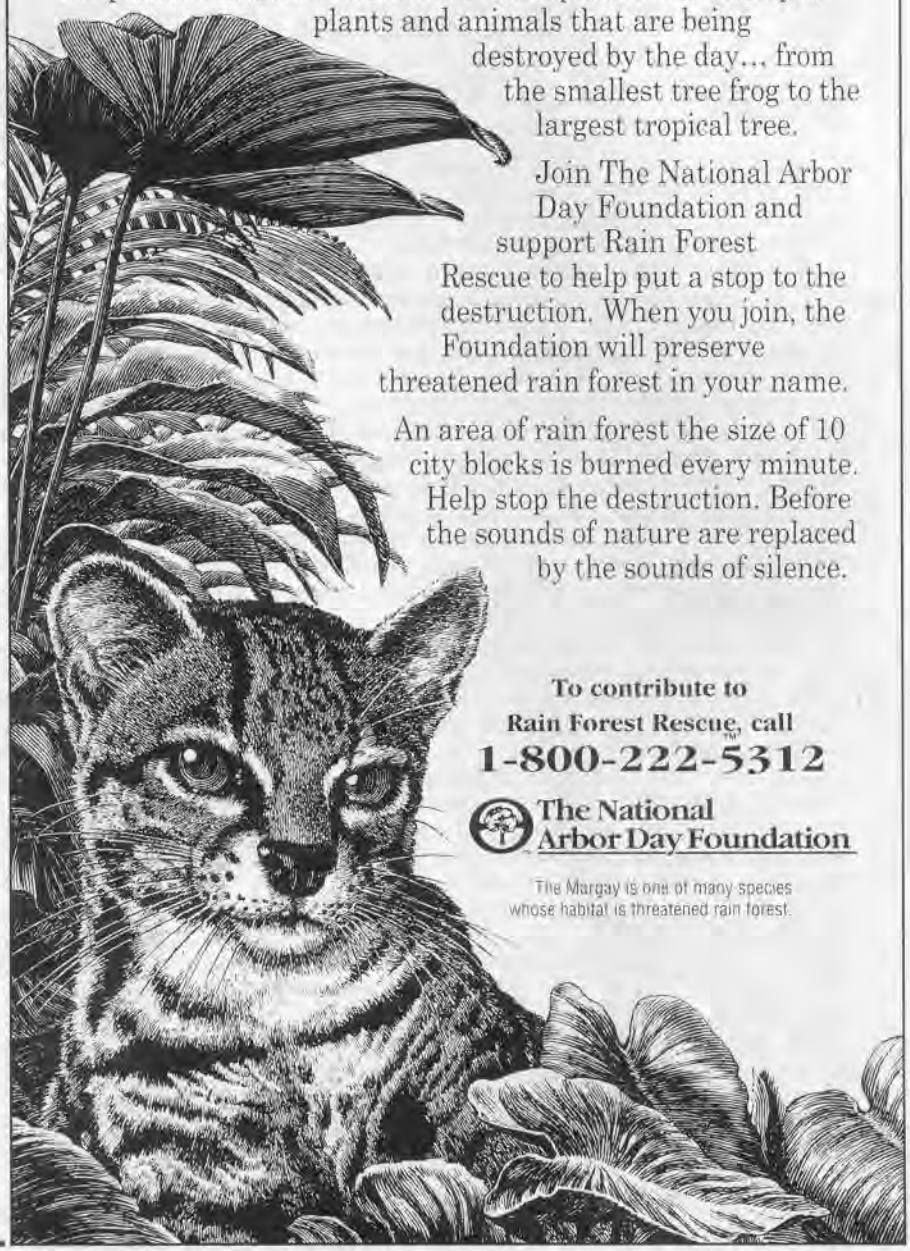

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